THE
QUEEN
O' THE
MAY.

SPRING.

SUMMER.

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Frontispiece.] "Mendelssohn's wedding March." [*See page* 249.

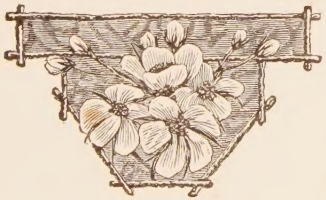
Clara Lemmon
November 11th
1886.

"THE QUEEN O' THE MAY."

BY

ANNE BEALE,

Author of "The Miller's Daughter," "The Young Refugee," &c.



THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY,
56, PATERNOSTER ROW; 65, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD;
AND 164, PICCADILLY.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY JUDD AND CO., PHŒNIX WORKS,
DOCTORS' COMMONS, E.C.

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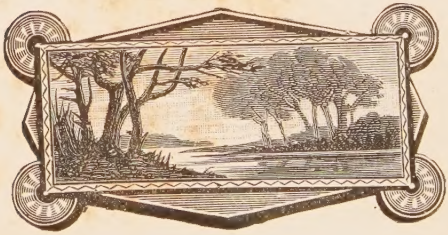


THE QUEEN O' THE MAY.

CHAPTER I.

HER GOLDEN THREADS.

"For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother; I'm to be Queen o' the May."—*Tennyson.*

"The lady with whom I have been in correspondence, says the child shall be met at the station nearest her grandparents' home." This was said by Mr. Everton, a young clergyman, to Mr. Hardman, master of a London union.

"We had better speak to the guard, sir. He will be responsible when my responsibility ceases. The child will be like so much luggage, directed and labelled, and put under his care," replied Hardman.

"I hope you do not consider all the children committed to your tender mercies, luggage, Hardman?"

"That would be impossible, sir, for they have to be fed, clothed, and educated; and, between ourselves, trouble enough they give us. But nothing compared to the casuals."

"Yet have they all souls to be saved," sighed the clergyman.

"There is the guard, sir," returned the master, shrugging his shoulders.

This conversation took place at the Paddington Railway Station. The subject of it was a little girl whom Mr. Everton held by the hand, and who walked with him towards the guard aforesaid. Hardman followed, muttering, "The parsons give themselves a deal of unnecessary trouble. I could have disposed of the matter in five minutes."

"This little girl is going into Wales. Will you see to her?" said Mr. Everton, to the guard, slipping a coin into his hand.

"All right, sir. What's her station?" was the reply.

"She is duly ticketed," returned Everton, pointing to a parchment label hung round the child's neck.

"Don't go beyond Llanelly, sir. But I'll see her into the hands of the other guard," said the man, examining the label. "Third-class, I suppose. Here's a through carriage. Passengers are always kind to a child. Ten minutes before we start."

Mr. Everton employed five of these ten minutes in pressing on the child that she was to be good and keep quiet, and that then she would see the green fields, and the mountains, and the sheep, and all the wonders of the country.

"I know," said the little girl, nodding mysteriously. "Where mamma was born. Shall I see her?"

"Your mother is in heaven, and you will see her there if you are good," replied the clergyman.

"Yes, I know," replied the child, with another peculiar nod.

"Only five minutes more. You had better put her in, sir," broke in Mr. Hardman, who was growing impatient.

"Good-bye, then, little May," said Mr. Everton, stooping to kiss her.

"Good-bye," she said, and put her arms round his neck. In so doing she knocked off her hat, and displayed

a mass of golden hair so remarkable that the bystanders pointed it out to one another. "I will write you a long letter," she whispered, as she tried to replace the obstreperous hat. "And I will come and see you."

Here Mr. Hardman took possession of her, and lifted her into the carriage, with the sententious words, "Be a good girl."

"Yes, I know. Kiss matron, and governess, and teacher, and Polly, and ——" she nodded; but the whistle of the engine interrupted further speech, for she started and put her fingers in her ears.

"Will you kindly look after this little girl?" said Mr. Everton, poking his head into the window of the carriage and addressing its inmates generally, while Hardman watched her small box placed in the van with the other luggage, and pointed it out to the guard.

"I'll see to her," answered somebody; and "Take care," screamed another body, as the train began to move, and Mr. Everton retreated amidst the crowd that still half covered the platform, albeit the long alligator of a train was full.

The child put her head out of the window to look after him, and again the hat fell back and displayed the threads of gold, through which the light glanced. A fellow-passenger held her by her skirt, or she might have fallen from the window in her eagerness to see the last of her friend. She was, however, drawn back into the carriage, and placed upon a seat by the kindly hand that had protected her. In another moment the train had started, and in a few seconds more it was free of the great glazed roof of the Great Western station, and bearing its freight of human beings towards their various destinations.

No individual of that freight could be more lonely than the child, though many might be more unhappy, sickly, or dispirited. She was young enough to enjoy the present, without much thought of past or future.

She was about six years of age, and small for her

years. She was dressed in shabby black, that had evidently belonged to some child better circumstanced than she. It had, in fact, been procured for her by Mr. Everton, who had interested some of his friends in her behalf. That portion of her clothing which her mourning dress concealed was good, and the neatly tucked petticoat and drawers showed that she had been at least well cared for before the black was put on. She was fair, pale, and somewhat attenuated, with an unnaturally old and wise look in her young face. Her small features were regular, and her inquisitive eyes blue; but her hair was the most remarkable part about her. Many a fashionable young lady of the present day would have given hundreds of pounds for such a coiffure, for it was so arranged, either by nature or art, that it surrounded her head like a ball of gilded thistledown. It was soft, fine, yet crisp; and each hair seemed separated from its fellows in a way that a Parisian *friseur* might have envied, in these days of mops and bristling brushes. But, had he stood over a Paris belle for a twelvemonth, he could not have produced the effect that was produced by little May's threads of burnished gold. Indeed, they were as inimitable as indescribable, but once seen were never forgotten. As the sun shone in upon her through the open windows on that glorious August morning, his subtle rays literally played at hide and seek amid the curiously intertwined yet open network of that strange little head.

As she sat, prim and silent, between two women, one of whom had a baby asleep in her arms, it attracted general attention. She appeared, however, for the moment unconscious of this; for she was looking from window to window on either side of her at the country she whirled through. At last she put her hand quietly into her pocket and drew out a very small doll, attired as a ballet-dancer.

"Terpsichore, I s'pose that's a field," she whispered to it, pointing with her small forefinger to the emerald

meads, whence the hay had long been carried, and where happy cattle grazed in the sunlight.

She was startled by the words from her next door neighbour—

"Yes, that's a field. Did you never see one before, child?"

Quickly restoring Terpischore to her jacket pocket, she glanced up at the speaker and surveyed her inquisitively. The question was repeated, and she gave a wise little nod in reply, that might have been taken either negatively or affirmatively.

"Where did you get that wonderful head of hair?" was the next question.

"God gave it me," she replied.

"But who frizzled it up like that?" asked the other neighbour.

"Nobody; it grew," she answered.

"It is surely a wig," put in a kindly-looking man opposite. "Take it off, my little dear."

"I can't. It was born so," she said, shaking the poor head vigorously, to the amusement of her surroundings.

The man laid his hand suddenly upon it to feel if it really proceeded from the scalp, upon which she drew back, and pulled on the refractory hat. It seemed as if the headgear would not, or could not, remain upon the elastic tissue, which also refused to be confined within proper bounds. It was, however, the means of interesting all her travelling companions, and even those in the other compartments tried to catch sight of the remarkable hair. Moreover, pieces of cake, sandwiches, peppermints, and various fruits were soon showered upon her; for no sooner was the train in the open country than its passengers began to eat and drink.

"Thank you, thank you," she repeated, over and over again, nodding, and surveying her new friends.

Her appetite appeared capacious enough for anything. All that was given her disappeared down her throat, save

a crumb or so of each gift, which was put into the pocket where her doll lay.

"That's for you, Terpsichore. Don't you wish mamma had some?" she whispered, bending over the said pocket.

"What's your doll's name?" asked one of her friends.

"Terpsichore."

"Why did you call her that?" said another.

"Because she dances in the pantomimes."

"Where's your mamma?" a third.

"In heaven."

This last reply, made with much solemnity, silenced her inquisitors for a time, and caused the one with the baby to present to her a small bottle containing some sort of strong-smelling liquid.

"Take a little drop, my dear. 'Tis only gin and water."

The child shook her head more sagely than ever, but the woman pressed her to drink.

"I'm a teetotaler," she whispered, putting back the bottle.

The women laughed, but a gentleman, seated in a remote corner, who had been listening, but not joining in the talk, leaned forward.

"What do you mean by a teetotaler, child?" he asked, gravely.

"I know," she replied, with her queer little nod.

"It would be well if all England did," he added, glancing round him. "Can you read, little one?"

Another assenting nod, and he presented her with a small book, with a picture frontispiece. Taking the opportunity thus afforded, he distributed a number of his books amongst the passengers, which caused a temporary lull, and many a sly wink and expressive gesture. But happily the time has gone by, or nearly so, when people scoff at the efforts made to improve them.

"A missionary gent," remarked somebody when he got out at the next station, and returned with a glass of water for the little girl, which she drank eagerly.

"What is your name?" he inquired, as she gave him back the glass.

"Madeline Goldworthy," she replied.

He examined the parchment suspended to her neck, took the glass, patted her on the cheek, and disappeared.

"How did you become a teetotaler?" asked her *vis-à-vis*, laughing.

"Mamma signed, and I signed, and Terpsichore signed," she answered; and there was so much laughter that she appeared offended for the first time. She deliberately shook her head when questioned further, and declined to reply.

At this point of the journey, the baby, who had been unusually quiet, began to cry. The mother tried to hush it in vain, and Miss May quickly condoned the offence by turning towards it, and nodding and smiling. The infant ceased its roar with a sudden gulp, and opened its big eyes wide at the little girl, who began to use her hands as well as head in her efforts to amuse it. She succeeded so well that the obstreperous youngster soon crowed with delight, and, when May's hat once more fell off, dashed its chubby hands right into the silken meshes of the hair.

"Tisn't a wig, after all!" exclaimed her opposite neighbour.

At Swindon the guard looked in upon her, and a few minutes afterwards the "missionary gent" re-entered the carriage, and asked her to come with him and have some tea. She followed him gladly, but instead of the scalding tea he took himself, he gave her a glass of milk. When he returned with her to her carriage the scene had changed, and fresh people filled it. She looked round alarmed, as if a new phase of her life had already begun; but the gentleman reassured her by saying that he was going as far as Llanelly, and would bear her company. He was a tall, thin young man, with a pale face and scant yellow beard and whiskers; but he had a pleasant, kindly, unostentatious manner, which reminded the child of her friend, Mr. Everton, and she at once placed confidence in

him. He seated her by his side and began to talk to her, but she was weary with the journey and excitement, and even while nodding or shaking her head in response to his inquiries—for her words were few—her eyes closed, and she fell fast asleep on his shoulder. He put one arm gently round her, and drew her towards him, and so she slumbered on undisturbed, until he finally lifted her upon his lap, and she slept with little intermission until they reached Llanelly.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT-GRANDPARENTS.

"THIS is the little girl. You must see that she is put out at Derwen Road," said the Great Western guard to him of the Welsh valleys.

May had already been aroused by the "missionary gent," and placed by him on the platform of the junction. She was looking sleepily around her when he said "good-bye" hurriedly, and hastened back to his carriage. The new guard examined the label round her neck, to which her railway ticket was fastened, took her through a small gate, where a porter peered into the said ticket, and finally lifted her into a compartment of a train that had been waiting for the arrival of that from London.

Here a new experience awaited her. The carriage was full of women returning from market, and they were talking Welsh. They were also, for the most part, dressed in the Welsh costume, and had on high hats, flannel shawls and gowns, and carried either on their knees or by their sides, large market baskets, filled with all sorts of commodities, from a new gown to a red herring. They were too busy talking to take particular notice of her, so

she was able to examine them with her shrewd little eyes, and speculate upon what they were saying.

The train, being no longer the express, went, if one may so say, at a foot's pace; and when she had completed her scrutiny of her companions she stood up and looked out of the window. Glancing round to assure herself she was unperceived, she drew Terpsichore from her pocket, and began to whisper to her confidentially. "That green must be a field, but I don't know what the yellow is. That's a mountain, I s'pose, and there's a little river."

The breeze blew off her hat, and she soon attracted the attention of her companions, who exclaimed, simultaneously, upon her hair. Theirs was, for the most part, black, and they began to speculate concerning the child. As they did so in Welsh, she was unaware of it, and continued her one-sided conversation with Terpsichore. All that she saw was new to her, and she had much to say upon it. The tiny ballet dancer listened attentively and did not contradict, so there was always amiability and peace between them; and if all young ladies could emulate Terpsichore there would be fewer disputes in the world. Meanwhile the speculations of the women merged into something like certainty.

"I shouldn't wonder if it's Evan, Derwen Fach's grandchild," said one. "There's been a talk that he's expecting one from London; and she must be a Londoner with that hair."

"Evan has children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren all over the world," pursued another. "Some in America, some in Australia, some in New Zealand; you can go from Wales to the world's end nowadays."

"And yet 'tis strange that he and his wife should have no child with them to cheer them up in their old age," remarked a third.

"Better without 'em," put in a fourth, who stepped out of the carriage as she spoke, displacing May and Terpsichore.

The train had stopped at a small roadside station, where it disgorged many of its passengers. There were several such stations before May reached her destination, and when she did so there were only three women left with her in her portion of it. These were the trio who had been discussing her, and who had made one or two attempts to speak to her; but, not understanding them, she had only replied by her customary mysterious little nods.

"Sure enough there *is* Evan, Derwen Fach," exclaimed one of the women, as the guard came to the carriage and called out "Derwen Road," with an accent that startled little May. Opening the door, he repeated, "Derwen Road. Here you are. Come you;" and lifted her out of the carriage.

Folding Terpsichore in her arms, she stood for a few seconds on the platform looking about her. It was a lonely little station, surrounded by fields and hills, and she saw no human habitation near. Only the three women, with their market baskets on their arms, her small box and small self, the station-master and an old man were on it, as the train went puffing off, more quickly than before, for the station-master had informed the guard that he was late. The child involuntarily held out her arms after it, as if it had been her last friend, and let fall Terpsichore.

Before she could pick her up, she was greeted by the man whom her former companion had called Evan, Derwen Fach. Her shoulder was pressed by a tender and trembling hand, and she was addressed in Welsh. One word sounded familiar to her—the word—*merch*, and she suddenly remembered a Welsh song her mother used to sing to her called *Merch Megan*, and that she was wont to say that she was her little *merch*, or daughter. So May glanced up at the speaker and nodded affirmatively. He took her hand, or rather essayed to do so, for she had not forgotten Terpsichore, whose robe of gauze was literally under Evan's foot.

She looked up at him imploringly, and he withdrew his foot with a smile so beautiful, that no sooner had she picked up her doll than she laid her hand confidingly in his. He led her to the wooden shed that served as station, sat down, took her in his arms, and kissed and blessed her. Tears were in his dark eyes when she threw her arms round his neck and returned his embrace with compound interest.

"You are my grandfather?" she whispered.

"Thy great-grandfather, child," he replied.

The three market women were watching the scene with praiseworthy patience and feminine curiosity, and no sooner was it over than they greeted Evan with a volley of questions. Whose child was she? Where did she come from? Was her father dead as well as her mother? Was he going to burden himself with a young thing like that? What would Peggy say to it? What would 'Lizbeth and the rest of 'em say?

"Peace, women!" he replied, with a wave of his hand and a twinkle of his eye. "Remember the curse. It was female curiosity that brought sin into the world. You will know all in time. Kindly lend me a hand, for my back's stiffer than usual with the rheumatics to-day. 'Tis change of weather."

The good-tempered women laid down their baskets, took up May's small box, and carried it to a cart that was waiting in a lane at the back of the station.

"If you've got the rheumatics, Evan, they only make you straighter than ever," laughed one. "I only wish I was half as upright. There's smart the little girl is."

"That's the worst of it, Molly. I can't stoop," returned Evan.

"Stiff's the word for you, mind and body," was the reply.

They put the box into the back of the cart, and lifted May to the front. Evan mounted with difficulty, the reins in his hands. The horse continued to munch the leaves of some pleasant shrub by the wayside until his master was seated, then trotted off of his own accord.

"Thank'ee; I'll do as much for you when you're my age," said Evan, turning round; and "Thank you," nodded little May, politely, turning also.

"We'll send round Thomas, the bellman, to-morrow, with my great-granddaughter's history," cried Evan.

"Go you off with your preaching and your jokes," cried the women.

May, understanding nothing of all this, found herself seated on a hard deal plank by the side of her grandfather, having had the foresight to consign Terpsichore to her pocket. The vehicle they were in was a market cart, painted a neat brown, and looking as young as its owner. May had occasionally been jolted in an omnibus in town, but she had not realised what jolting meant until she felt it in the country. The horse jogged on at a solemn pace, through deep ruts, over large stones, and across a pebbly brook, and May laid hold of her grandfather's arm unceremoniously, feeling sure that she would be jolted out. He perceived that her legs were not long enough to reach the bottom of the cart, and, saying "whoa!" to his horse, who stopped forthwith, he pulled her box forward, in order that she might rest her feet upon it.

"She is but a little one. What will the old woman do with her?" he muttered in Welsh; then in English to May, "How old art thou, child?"

"Six and a quarter," she replied. "Please, what is that?" She pointed to a field of corn, ripe for the harvest.

"That! Why, the wheat that makes thy daily bread. Where hast lived all thy life?"

"In London," she said, shrinking back, ashamed of her ignorance; but another hard jolt soon obliged her to stick to her grandfather again.

"Lay hold of my arm," he said; and so they proceeded arm-in-arm—he lost in thought, she wearied, yet wondering and longing to get out of the cart to gather some of the masses of wild clematis, convolvulus, and foxglove that adorned the hedgerows, and looked fair, even in the hastening twilight.

When they reached the bottom of the long lane their road lay through a field surrounded by gigantic oaks. Here, in the solitude, the child started at what seemed an accustomed sound. She looked towards the side whence it came, and saw some sort of engine at work on a distant mound, and a flame of fire and a cloud of smoke rise from amongst the trees. It was getting dusk, and the scene was almost ghostly. The big, black shaft stood forth like a spectre in the midst of the smoke, while the hideous sound of the engine disturbed the peace of nature.

"The gas-works! Terpsichore, the gas-works!" exclaimed May, with delight. "Where's the lamp?"

"That's a coal mine," corrected her grandfather. "Hullo, Meredith! where do you spring from?"

The latter part of this speech was addressed to a lad who came running across the field from the said mine, and stopped breathless at the side of the cart. He terrified May, for his face was as black as a chimney-sweep's, and his whole appearance was grimy. "Perhaps he's a crossing-sweeper," she thought, "and wants a copper."

"Here's one of thy three hundred cousins, child. Shake hands with him. Meredith, here's a little niece for thee," said Evan, pulling up his horse.

May did as she was bid, and held out her small hand; but the boy looked at her in a puzzled sort of way, and took off his cap, displaying on his side almost as curly a head of black hair as hers of golden. The eyes that looked from the darkened face sparkled like stars, and, together with the red lips and white teeth, made May think he was a negro, or, at least, dressed up as one.

"Are you Sambo?" she asked, half jumping out of the cart.

"No, I'm Meredith," he replied, offended. "A collier, not a blackamoor. Who is she, grandfather?" he added, in Welsh.

"Jump up and come home with me, and you shall hear," was the reply.

"I can't, for I'm on the watch. Father left me in charge."

"Then you've no business here, sir. Go back directly," said Evan, severely, jerking the reins and setting off.

May watched her cousin run back to the mine, and he glanced at his niece, as their grandfather had respectively called them; for Meredith was her mother's first cousin, and she would, in Wales, be called his niece—a Welsh niece, in fact, or cousin-german.

"I never knew the boy neglect his duty before," grumbled Evan. "I shall tell his father. Nothing but curiosity. He saw someone in the cart with me, and couldn't resist coming to see who it was. That must be flogged out of him."

Fortunately for May's repose of mind, she did not understand this, or her personal fears might have been great, for, although she had never been flogged herself, she had seen others flogged, and knew that they had deserved it, although milder measures might, perhaps, have been equally beneficial. However, she had never studied the subject philosophically; she had only a great horror of any sort of blow, having, unfortunately, witnessed the brawling of a poor London neighbourhood.

"Now, you must hold the reins, for I'm going to walk up this hill," said her grandfather, suddenly. "There; just so. Sit in the middle of the seat and say, 'Gee up, Siriol.'"

May took the reins, obediently, said "Gee up, Siriol," and felt more important than she had ever felt before.

"Now I am a 'bus driver and you are conductor, Terpsichore!" she said aloud, as her grandfather walked by the side of Siriol; but she could never have imagined that "Siriol" meant "lightsome," inasmuch as he was a remarkably slow and lumbering steed. Still, he had been lightsome, like his master, in his youth, and we must not despise old age whether in biped or quadruped; indeed, if we could but realise it, there is no more pathetic sight in nature than an old horse or an old dog doing his utmost

to please his master and to work on till the end. They read us a fine lesson if we could but learn it, and if we could all only learn it aright there would be no need of a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

"That's a brave girl. I dare say you never drove before," said Evan, when they reached the hill-top and he mounted again.

May shook her head, as she relinquished the reins, and was delighted to see Siriol set off at something like a trot. It had been but a short hill after all, and she spied a small house in the distance, with smoke curling from its chimney straight up into the big oaks that surrounded it. These oaks looked red, for their leaves were already beginning to change colour, and the glowing western heavens, with the sun just about to dip below the horizon, were exactly opposite them, and cast their roseate hues upon them. May looked on the scene with amazement, and murmured something about pantomimes to Terpsichore as they drove through another very rutty lane, by the side of which tripped a frolicsome brook, and finally pulled up at the small wicket gate of a whitewashed cottage.

Out came a sheep-dog, barking merrily, followed by a stout woman in cap and pinners. The good dame waddled with some difficulty down half a dozen rough steps, and met May just as her grandfather had lifted her from the cart. The child's hat had fallen off, and she stood in trembling awe, awaiting the greeting of this her great-grandmother. It came, happily for May, in Welsh, for, as the good woman stooped to embrace her, she said—

"Hach! she's no more like her mother than my old cow; and she's got a head like a fuzz-bush."

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE LABAN.

May followed her grandmother through a steep garden into the house, which was called Derwen Fach, or the Little Oak. They entered at once upon the kitchen, where a comfortable fire was burning, which seemed to cheer the child's drooping spirits. This new world appeared very different to her from the one she had quitted only that morning. Old Peggy, as her grandmother was called, lifted her on a settle that stood on one side of the fire, and surveyed her attentively. May put one finger on her lip, and looked much as if she was about to cry; but she refrained bravely, and fixed her shrewd eyes on her grandmother instead, as if to say, "I, too, want to know what sort of a person you are." This made Peggy burst out laughing until her fat sides shook with her own merriment. May disliked being laughed at even more than being stared at, and slipped off the settle, which rather increased Peggy's mirth. She was, indeed, what is called "a jolly old woman," and no one who saw her comely, round, unwrinkled face for the first time could have believed that she was nearly seventy years of age. A stranger might have taken her for fifty. But May did not speculate concerning her age; she only thought her very rude. And as Peggy spoke little or no English, this first impression was hard to erase However, she submitted to have her jacket taken off, during which proceeding she abstracted Terpsichore from its pocket.

Her grandfather came in just as this was effected, and began to talk to his wife in Welsh, while May stood before the fire and surveyed them and the abode that was henceforth to be her home. Even she, young as she was, felt how great was the contrast between the aged pair, who yet looked almost youthful. Evan was tall and thin;

Peggy short and stout. He was grave; she mirthful. His features were long and sharp; hers short and round; and their manner corresponded to their appearance. The kitchen in which they stood was much like ordinary cottage rooms, though the house professed to be a farm and its owner a farmer. It was well filled with furniture, and May was particularly attracted by a tall clock with a half-moon on its face, and a corner cupboard resplendent in ornaments, glass, and silver. She had not, however, long to make her observations, for her grandfather remarked that she must be hungry, and she nodded an affirmative. There was a round table placed by the settle near the fire, on which tea-things were spread, and a delicious odour of cooking greeted the child's olfactory nerves, though she had not discovered whence it came. She was soon enlightened, for Peggy went to the fire and moved something on the top of it, which turned out to be a cake cooking on a sheet of iron, which May afterwards learned was called plank bread. This was soon transferred to the table and duly buttered, after which some slices of bacon were abstracted from a Dutch-oven that stood on a trivet before the fire.

"Isn't it nice, Terpsichore?" whispered May.

"She can talk, then?" exclaimed Peggy to Evan. "I was afraid she was deaf and dumb. She do look queer and half starved."

"Stupid woman, you know she is from London, and talks English," replied Evan.

"Oh, poo' fellow! poo' fellow!" exclaimed Peggy, putting her hand suddenly on May's head. "'Tis like a fleece of wool," she added to her husband.

May withdrew, scarcely liking to be called "poo' fellow," and not understanding the scantiness of her grandmother's English vocabulary. She ceased to think about it, however, when she was told to take a seat that was placed for her at the tea-table, and she found herself in face of the dainties she had been longing to taste. With a side glance at Peggy, she laid Terpsichore near

her teacup. Evan said grace, upon which she was off her chair in a second, folded her hands, shut her eyes, and repeated distinctly the rhythmical grace she had been taught in London.

"God bless her! Mary didn't forget her own teaching, then," said Evan, while a tear rolled down Peggy's cheek. "Did thy mother teach thee that?"

May nodded. She had not yet forgotten Mr. Everton's injunction to keep quiet and good. She was soon eating vigorously, and delighted her grandmother by her tidy use of knife, fork, and spoon.

"We must fatten her up. Milk's the best thing for her," remarked Peggy, aside, and poured plenty of milk into her tea. "Look you, Evan, see how she sops up the dripping with her bread. There's careful she is."

"She hasn't had too much to eat, I'll warrant," sighed Evan.

May had never tasted anything so nice in her life as that plank bread, and it seemed as if she would never have done eating. But she finished at last with a heavy sigh, which set her grandmother laughing again, slipped off her chair, and once more repeated her grace.

Just as she was uttering the last word a man walked in, who appeared to May almost as much of a negro as the boy she had seen on her way to the farm.

"Is that Mary's child?" he asked, walked up to her, and took her in his arms. "Poor Mary! poor little orphan!" he muttered, as he pressed his blackened cheek to hers.

Sympathy! what a power it has! May forgot the mine-blackened face and the grimy garments in that warm, fatherly embrace. It opened the sluices of the little heart, so long courageously closed, and she began to sob.

"Put her down, Laban. She is frightened at thy black face," said Evan.

But when Laban essayed to do so, she clung to him.

"She is tired to death, poor lamb," he said. "Best put her to bed." And without more ado he carried her

into an inner room, which served for bed-chamber and parlour. Here a long sort of crib had been prepared for her, which she was too much overcome to notice that night, though subsequently she took much pleasure in the elaborate carving of its black, oaken panels.

"Give me some flannel to wipe the soot off," he said to his mother. "Don't cry; Uncle Laban won't hurt you," he added, wiping the black from her face, but her moist eyelids had already closed over the blue eyes, and she was half asleep. He undressed her tenderly, while Evan and Peggy fumbled over the strap of her little box, and succeeded in finding her night-dress, which was soon slipped on.

"I don't see a cap," muttered Peggy.

"Couldn't put that golden fleece into a cap," returned Evan, becoming unintentionally classical.

But no sooner was she laid in her snow-white bed than she started up in terror, glanced wildly about her, and cried "Terpsichore, Terpsichore."

"What dost mean by such a heathen name?" asked Evan, little knowing how near the truth was his question.

"My baby—my doll!" she screamed in agony.

Peggy understood, having seen it on the tea-table. She waddled laughing into the other room, and returned with the little ballet dancer, whom May embraced with transport. Then she knelt down on her bed, placed the doll on her pillow, clasped her hands, closed her eyes, and began to say her prayers.

"Let us pray with and for the child," said old Evan, and the trio knelt down beside the cot, while she prayed God to "bless papa and mamma, not forgetting Terpsichore." When she had concluded with our Lord's prayer, she opened her eyes, and saw the others still on their knees. "Hush!" she whispered to Terpsichore; but was asleep again before they rose.

They laid her in her bed, and as she instinctively opened her little arms, Laban placed the doll in them, and she slumbered in perfect peace.

"What in the world is this?" asked Peggy, seating herself on a carved oak chair, and stooping to pick up a wreath of artificial flowers that had fallen out of the child's box.

"It is hawthorn! How pretty!" said Laban, examining it.

"Some tinsel temptation of Satan, like that doll. Put it away, grandmother," said Evan, severely.

Peggy soon laid, not only the wreath or crown, but May's whole wardrobe, in a drawer which had been previously cleared, and the box was pushed under the crib.

"Here's our Mary's Bible, that the ladies gave her," cried Peggy, breaking down for the first time.

They all examined the sacred volume, and all uttered a "Thank God for this."

"Have you had any more news of her?" asked Laban, who, although a hale man of about forty, was her uncle, and consequently May's great uncle.

"Nothing but what the clergyman wrote," replied Evan "He said that he had been with Mary on her death-bed, and that he had asked her for the address of her friends that he might communicate with them about the child. She gave him mine, saying she did not know whether her husband was alive or dead. When I wrote back and asked him to send the child here and see that poor Mary was decently buried, he replied that the child was in the Union, but that my wishes should be attended to. As I can't write English, I asked Miss Edith to write for me, and I expect she will have another letter next week. She was here this morning with one she had received, saying the child would be here to-day. That Mr. Everton must be a pious man, and I am thankful Mary had him with her."

"How different it would have been if she had married a neighbour," sighed Laban.

"That sort of artist chap was quite unsuitable," responded Evan. "It would never have happened if I

hadn't been weak enough to let him paint her picture. He said he was poor, and that her face would make his fortune. Poor, indeed! He had better have broken stones upon the roads down here than have taken her up to London to starve."

"I believe they loved one another all the same," put in Peggy. "What a pretty wedding they had, and how happy they seemed!"

"She knew it was contrary to my wishes, who brought her up from childhood," said Evan. "Do you remember the explosion, Laban, when her father was killed in the mine, along with his two sons and five others! Keep your house in order, Laban, lest a like thing come upon you."

"God forbid, father! I shall never forget it," replied Laban, with a groan.

"There now! don't go over that terrible story again," put in Peggy, throwing her apron over her cap and pinners, as if to shut out the recollection. "Go you home, Laban, or you'll never be washed for Sunday," she continued. "And I'll be bound there's 'Lizbeth and Leah and Rachel, and all the rest, waiting with the tub ready and the water boiling."

"Meredith left his post to run across the field to me. You must punish him. 'Spare the rod, spoil the child.' That's what Peggy did to Mary," said Evan.

"He has told me, father; he will never do it again. He wanted just to see the new cousin, and said she was like one of the dolls in the fair," returned Laban, hurrying off with a hasty good-night.

"He spoils that lad," muttered Evan.

"No good to be too strict," said Peggy, under her voice, bestirring herself to clear the kitchen before retiring for the night.

Evan remained some time seated by May's cot. The moonlight streamed in through the window, the firelight through the open door, and the beam and glow kindled the old-fashioned furniture into something that seemed

almost like life. The sheep-dog had crept into the room, and lay unnoticed at his feet; while a tortoiseshell cat and kitten lay undisturbed within the large cupboard bedstead that had served him and Peggy as a nightly couch for half a century. This bedstead, with its panelled door, was, like the cot, chest of drawers, clothes-chest, and chairs of carved oak, blackened by time. The old couple might have realised a small fortune by the sale of these articles to some antiquary, but they preferred keeping their own heir-looms to letting them be elsewhere.

Evan had fallen into a dream of retrospection, and while apparently watching May's pale little face, had let his thoughts wander backward through all his wedded life. Although neither he nor Peggy had ever been far from their home, they had seen more vicissitudes in it than most people. They had there brought up a large family, who were, as the market woman had said that morning, scattered all over the earth. He could count his descendants by scores, some of whom were abroad, some at home; but only comparatively few lived in his immediate neighbourhood. His son Laban and his family, and a daughter who had married a small farmer like himself, were the nearest, though he had many grandsons variously employed in the country. He was nearly eighty years old, and now the youngest of his numerous descendants, as far as he knew, slumbered beside him, and he and his wife must begin life again for her sake. The two lofts that used to serve as bedrooms for his children were converted into cheese-room and granary, and she was to occupy the space below stairs that her mother used to fill. He was too old, he thought, for such a responsibility, yet must he do his duty by the child. But at least she should not be spoilt. He would be strict and stern with her, as he strove to be with Meredith; and, if it pleased God to let her grow up, she should go to no worldly amusements, where she could fall in with such a man as her father.

"How much longer are you going to sit there addling

your brains over that child?" broke in Peggy, startling him from his dreams. "'Tis bedtime over and over again, and here's your pipe unsmoked."

Evan rose at the conjugal command, and the whiff of his tobacco, together with the cheerful sound of Peggy's voice, dispelled his anxieties for the moment.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST SUNDAY.

THE day after May's arrival at Derwen Fach was Sunday. Her grandparents were astir at cockcrow attending to the house and farm, but she was allowed to sleep until what they considered a late hour.

"She was so tired last night," pleaded old Peggy.

"Mind you, I'll have no indulgence," replied Evan.

It was, however, nearly nine o'clock when May was aroused from her slumbers. She was much startled at sight of her grandmother and the strange room, but reassured by the presence of Terpsichore. Peggy was greatly relieved at finding that she could wash and dress herself, so having pointed out her drawer and such washing materials as the room afforded, she left her to her own devices. She felt nervous at being alone in a strange place, and dressed as quickly as she could, but scarcely quick enough for Evan, who called her to her breakfast before she had touched her hair. She went at once, her doll in her arms.

"This is Sunday; no playthings to-day. Set you that bit of trumpery aside," said Evan.

May withdrew much abashed, and laid Terpsichore in her drawer beside her hawthorn crown. She was, however, careful to abstract an ornamental card from her

mother's Bible, and to place it on her doll's breast, with the words, "This is Sunday. You must be good, and learn your text." Then she closed the drawer, and returned to the kitchen, where a basin of hot bread and milk was awiting her.

"That's a good girl," said her grandfather, approvingly at which May nodded significantly, as if she was well aware of her own graces.

"Ask her where her brush and comb are," said Peggy to Evan, entering from the sleeping apartment.

He did so, and May shook her head with the words, "Can't comb it. Wash it all over," which she uttered without withdrawing her attention from the excellent bread and milk she was eating with much gusto.

Peggy stood to look at her with her arms akimbo, and began to laugh heartily. But May was now too well engaged to be offended.

"I'll see if I can't comb it, anyways," she said.

"With a three-legged stool," put in Evan, as he went to don his best coat, and was followed by his wife.

No sooner had they disappeared than May was startled by feeling something cold rub against her right arm. She turned, and saw the sheep-dog, Hedfa, or Flight, poking his nose almost into her basin.

"Go along," she exclaimed, with a push, but Hedfa did not understand English, and remained seated.

She was afraid of dogs, and while moving her chair away from him, and keeping her eye upon him, was further troubled by some sort of tickling sensation in her left arm. This was the cat, who had unceremoniously jumped upon the table, and had her tongue out ready to lap up the remainder of May's milk. Not knowing what to do between them, the child screamed, "Great-grandmother," for the first time. She was almost as much startled by the appearance of Peggy as she had been by the attentions of the animals, for that excellent old lady had just put on her best scarlet cloak and tall beaver hat.

"Mother Hubbard!" she exclaimed, slipped from her

seat, and ran towards Peggy, while the cat and dog scuttled off. She threw her arms round her, which delighted her grandmother, who did not understand that she owed this demonstration of affection to some childish memory. She embraced her with her fat arms as well as she could, and May returned to finish her bread and milk, feeling disappointed that Mother Hubbard was but her grandmother after all. Just as she was scraping up the last mouthful, Evan came in, with—

"Now, you must get ready for church, child." If she had been astonished by her grandmother's appearance, she was still more so by his, for he looked quite a gentleman, to her unaccustomed eyes. His Sunday coat was of the best broadcloth, and his knee-breeches of finest kerseymere. Peggy had knitted his stockings with the softest of Welsh wool, and washed and starched his linen shirt and fine frill into something akin to frozen snow. As to his hat, it was brushed as smooth as his wife's and no more could be said in its praise. But Evan, in spite of his small abode, was a person of consideration in the district. He had even been churchwarden, and was a member of the Board of Guardians. Besides, he was so remarkably good-looking, could speak two languages, and was an oracle amongst his family and neighbours!

"I wish I had a hat like great-grandmother's!" May whispered to Terpsichore, with a sigh, as she put her black straw with its shabby crêpe trimming on the golden network.

But she looked very pretty as she tripped down the garden-steps, turning the same bright little head from right to left to look at the dahlias, sunflowers, and fuchsias, that blossomed unceremoniously amongst the potatoes, kidney beans, and apple trees that surrounded the cottage; thus showing that they were in no wise ashamed of their less brilliant companions.

When they were outside the garden, old Peggy took

Evan's arm, and May was left to follow at will, and to make her observations. Not having Terpsichore to talk to, she addressed her prayer-book; for she had much to say, and she always talked to herself aloud. Everything was as beautiful as it was new to her, and she instinctively loved the beautiful. The walk to the church, which was over two miles, was through rocky lanes, where fern and foxglove flourished, across meadows and fields of waving corn, by rapid brooks, and among gigantic oaks. The neighbourhood was celebrated for these primæval trees, and many druidical remains were found in the vicinity. May was frightened when she and her companions suddenly dived into a grove of them, and rejoiced when they again emerged into the more open country. Hills and mountains rose on all sides, and she longed to be on the top of the very highest.

The village and church of Derwen, to which they came at last, were picturesquely situated amid an amphitheatre of hills. May jumped for joy when she first heard the bells and saw the spire tipped by the morning sunshine.

"Take care, child," said her grandfather at this ebullition. "Look you at yonder bridge."

This was a wooden structure with a rail, thrown across a turbulent brook, or mimic river, which they had to cross before they reached the church. May trembled to see her grandmother walk over it, and imitated her movements as nearly as she could as she followed behind; so nearly, indeed, that her ludicrous little figure induced a burst of youthful merriment from some young people on the other side.

"How rude the Welsh are!" muttered May, as these juveniles surrounded Evan and Peggy with many a "Good morning." They, like May, were grandchildren. "There is a young gentleman," she continued, as one of them approached her. This youth was so good-looking and well-dressed, that she added, "P'raps it's Robin Hood."

"How do you do, cousin?" he said, in good English,

and May said, "Very well, thank you; how are you?" in reply.

He laughed at the little nod which accompanied this, and asked if she had ever seen him before. She answered in the negative.

"You thought I was Sambo last night," he said.

"Then you have been washed white!" she returned.

"Children; the last bell," interrupted Evan, and they followed the old people, still arm-in-arm, into church.

All four sat in the same pew. It was a pretty country church that had but lately been restored, but it looked very small to May, who had been accustomed to the large, handsome city churches. The service, also, sounded unfamiliar, and when she opened her prayer-book, as she had been taught to do, at the Exhortation, and fixed her eyes on the "Dearly beloved brethren," she could neither make head nor tail of it. Meredith, seeing her perplexity, whispered that it was all Welsh, but she must keep her eye on her book, or grandfather would be angry. This was more than May could do, and when her grandmother, next whom she sat, lifted her up to stand upon the seat, she stared about her like a wise little owl.

"Put her down. Don't you see that the whole congregation is looking at her head?" said Evan, authoritatively, and poor May was again placed where she could neither see nor be seen.

Meredith persistently found her places for her, and pointed out, from time to time, the particular line or word in her prayer-book, corresponding to his; but as she was not yet a perfect reader, this puzzled her and amused him. When the singing of the hymns began, however, she could no longer be expected to look at a book, since she had none. It was principally congregational, and nothing could be finer than the volume of sound that proceeded both from voice and heart. The Welsh are essentially musical, and the greater part of the congregation were, more or less, trained singers. Evan still sang bass, and Meredith had a voice that promised to develop into a fine

tenor. Peggy quavered somewhat, and went off into various trills and shakes admired in her youth, but yet she sang well. May's inquiring eyes wandered from one to the other, while her ears caught the grand old Welsh hymn, and before it was concluded a sweet young voice was heard to join in it. The child, forgetting all save the music, was humming with the rest, in perfect time and tune. Not even Evan cared to stay the tender refrain, and as to Meredith, he paused in his own singing to listen, while Peggy laid her hand admiringly on May's shoulder. During the sermon she fell asleep. She had done her best to listen to the energetic extempore preaching of the worthy vicar, and had even liked the sonorous guttural of the Welsh tongue. But slumber overcame her at last, and the nodding little head nodded off the hat. Fortunately Peggy's portly form concealed her from Evan, and Meredith managed to place his shoulder so that she could lean against it, and despite his best efforts he found himself trying to count the silken threads through which the sunbeams wandered.

When the service was over, Evan, as was his wont, left the church immediately. Indeed, his friends and neighbours habitually waited for him to take the lead, for he was held in such respect that no one cared to be caught gossipping after service by this severe mentor. He himself disapproved of the customary gatherings round the church-door, saying that it is impossible that either service or sermon should benefit those who began to talk of their own affairs and their neighbours' business as soon as they were over. He and Peggy, accordingly, walked silently down the churchyard path, followed by Meredith and May, and recrossed the wooden bridge long before the remainder of the congregation had left the church, much less the churchyard.

It must be confessed that this was always a trial to garrulous old Peggy, who did not see much of her neighbours during the week, and who would have dearly liked a Sunday gossip.

While May peeped back at the people round the church, they were commenting freely upon her, and wondering what had really become of her mother; for Evan had *not* sent the bellman round as he threatened to do. She was also wishing very much that her new relation, Meredith, would speak to her; but he, like his grandfather, remained lost in his own thoughts until they got fairly into the fields. Not that he was thinking of the sermon. On the contrary, he suddenly stood before Evan, and proved that he was not quite "a chip of his particular block."

"Father tells me that you think I ought to be flogged, grandfather, for leaving my post for those few seconds yesterday. I'm quite ready, for I believe you were right," he said.

"Go home, sir, and think of the sermon, and prepare for this afternoon," replied Evan, not knowing whether this speech were penitence or daring.

"Shall I come to-morrow?" asked the lad.

"Go home, sir, and pray to God to teach you to do your duty in that state of life in which Providence has placed you," returned Evan, and Meredith ran off with a nod to May, who, not understanding what had passed, thought it a sorry leave-taking.

"The afternoon" to which Evan had alluded brought another new experience for May. After dinner they all set forth again, but this time their walk was comparatively short. A distance of about half a mile brought them to a drive which led to a gentleman's house. It was short, and the entrance-gate unostentatious; but May saw with amazement and delight a pretty country place for the first time. It was a somewhat small house, covered with all kinds of parasitical plants, the most prominent of which was the Virginia creeper, beginning to assume its crimson dress. Bow windows and a small conservatory, together with a pretty garden on one side, and a shrubbery flanked by trees and rising ground on the other, were the features that commended themselves to her attention.

They went to a side door which was open, and entered without knocking. Then through a passage into a large room, where two ladies were seated, surrounded by a number of empty chairs and forms. All the doors of the house were open.

"Good afternoon, Evan. How d'ye do, Peggy? First as usual," said the elder of the two ladies, coming forward to shake hands with the aged pair.

"This is Mary's little girl, ladies. Make your curchey to the ladies, child," said Evan, pointing to May, who was hesitating just inside the doorway.

She hesitated no longer, but advancing a few paces, took the skirt of her black frock between the tips of her fingers, spread it as far as it would extend, stood on the points of her toes, drew one foot forwards and the other a little behind, and performed a curtsey so graceful and elaborate that the four spectators contemplated her with astonishment.

"You darling!" exclaimed the younger of the two ladies, catching her up in her arms and kissing her.

"Bless your kind heart, Miss Edith; that's just like you!" ejaculated Peggy, while Evan looked on.

CHAPTER V.

CLASS AND CHOIR.

THE abode to which May was now introduced was called Derwen Fawr, or the Great Oak. Its owner and tenant was the gentleman to whom belonged the coal mine which May had seen. Every Sunday afternoon and one evening during each week it was thrown open to all who chose to enter, and almost before May was released from Miss Edith's arms the room in which they were began to fill. So did the whole of the basement. Miss Edith led May

from room to room, saying that she must accustom herself to her new friends, and while doing so introduced her to three other young ladies—her sisters. Their name was Richards, and they devoted themselves to striving to do good to the people around them. This was their Sunday-school. With the exception of the drawing-room, each apartment contained a class, the members of which varied in age from three to eighty. There were one or two teachers in each room, amongst whom May espied Meredith, who gave her a somewhat patronising nod. He was surrounded by boys, while, strange to say, his father was a learner—that is, he was one of some twenty or thirty men and women who assembled in the large kitchen to read and discuss Holy Scripture with the eldest Miss Richards, who was a careful and constant student of the sacred volume. It was here that May finally anchored, for Miss Edith fancied she was frightened at the sight of so many strangers, which was, however, a mistake, and told Evan that she had perhaps better remain with him this first Sunday. Evan was of a contrary opinion, and she would probably have been remanded to a class of contemporaries had not a kind voice been heard to say, "Come to Uncle Laban," and May, looking in its direction, saw a comely-faced man beckoning her towards him. She scarcely recognised the friend of the previous evening, but she knew the kind voice, and went to him at once. Miss Edith withdrew to her especial work, and in a few minutes the hum of many voices resounded throughout Derwen Fawr.

It would have been dull for May but for her inquiring mind and inquisitive eyes, for the class was conducted in Welsh. She was first of all attracted by the serious face and composed demeanour of Miss Richards, who sat, with a large commentary on her knees, reading in turn with her class. Then there were the aged men and women, some of whom read fluently, others with difficulty; the middle-aged, like Uncle Laban; and the younger people, most of whom had babies or two-year-old children in their

This was their Sunday School.

arms or on their knees. All held Bibles, and all were so deeply interested in what they read that no one remarked May's vivacious glances. Indeed, she was well-nigh lost to sight between Uncle Laban and some other man. As they wandered, however, she made her own peculiar inward comments, and was not slow to imagine that two white-aproned members of the class were servants of the house, and that her grandfather, who sat next Miss Richards, was even more of an expounder than that young lady.

Older people than May would have been surprised at the knowledge of Scripture evinced by all. Miss Richards had frequently to turn to her commentary to answer some pertinent question, and Evan to refer to his marginal references. Even the battle of Armageddon had to be expounded by means of discussion and the commentary, and May, whose ears were even quicker than her eyes, caught up the long-sounding word and repeated it to herself. When tired of listening to readings, conversation, and expositions that she could not understand, she turned her attention to the room in which they sat. Next to the fire, which was adorned with white-washed balls, the rack overhead attracted her most, for there hung from it bunches of brilliant-hued tomatoes and cunningly constructed ropes of onions, to say nothing of flitches of bacon of considerable dimensions. That kitchen appeared to her the most lovely room she had ever been in, for was not the large dresser a mass of beautiful crockery-ware? and was not the window-sill full of flower-pots, and the mantelshelf of shining brass?

Suddenly the sound of music in a neighbouring room made her start, stand up, and listen. For the moment she forgot everything else.

"It is a barrel organ!" she exclaimed.

"Hush!" said Uncle Laban; and, "Take her into the dining-room," said Miss Richards to one of the white-aproned domestics.

May was accordingly led back to where Miss Edith was

seated at a harmonium, surrounded by many girls of all ages, who were singing hymns.

"Let her come to me, Susan," said Miss Edith, and May was planted at the musician's side.

She had seen various instruments in London, but never a harmonium, and she examined it carefully, to the amusement of the juvenile bystanders.

"Can you sing hymns?" asked Miss Edith, and May nodded.

"What hymns?" continued the young lady.

"Any ones," was the reply; and so it really seemed, for the child's sweet soprano joined in all the hymns, whether Welsh or English, that followed.

"She is my niece," said one of the elder girls, proudly. "She can come and sing to our harmonium."

This was Laban's eldest daughter, Leah, who forthwith took May by the hand. But, for some inscrutable reason, May withdrew from her. She had not understood that her father, like many another collier, had actually purchased a harmonium, and that Meredith played it. There was music in the cottages and even in the mine, as well as in Derwen Fawr.

The school was over before five o'clock, having lasted nearly three hours. Evan came in search of May.

"You *must* bring her next Thursday evening," said Miss Edith. "She has the sweetest voice I ever heard. Do bring her, just for once."

"She is full young, Miss Edith," responded Evan; "but she shall come if you wish it. Still, I am afraid it would make the other children jealous."

"Bring her on Thursday, at any rate," put in Mrs. Richards. "But, you know, Edith, that it does not do to make favourites."

"No, mamma; but she is such a queer little creature, and I want to know more of her and her history."

Edith was the youngest of the four Misses Richards. She was a pretty, bright girl, and a general favourite. She was at everyone's beck and call, and it was to her

that Evan had turned in his perplexity about May, and it was she who had written concerning her to Mr. Everton, in answer to his letter to Evan. Not that she was better, or did more good than her sisters; only she was the youngest by the accident of birth, and she declared that she was imposed upon accordingly.

"The eldest has all the responsibility, and the youngest all the work," she would say. "There is Bertha as grave as a judge at four and twenty, and here am I borne down by waiting upon everybody at sixteen, while Sarah and Sophy do nothing but amuse themselves."

Still, she generally managed to have things much as she desired, and on the Thursday evening alluded to Evan appeared with May.

During the three intermediate days May had become more accustomed to her surroundings, and returned the greetings of her friends with some degree of cordiality. Evan was inclined to consider her too sharp and precocious for her years, and Peggy could make nothing of her; but she was already beginning to pick up Welsh, and doubtless she and her grandmother would understand one another in time.

It was nearly eight o'clock when May found herself once more in that cheerful kitchen. The harmonium was now in the centre of it, and Miss Edith and her sister Bertha were awaiting them and the rest of their large singing class. They greeted each member of it by name as they arrived and took their seats, and watchful May perceived that they were neither so clean nor so smart as they had been on the previous Sunday. The fact was that most of them came from the pit, and had hardly had time to hurry home and wash their faces and hands, before coming straight to their beloved music class. The eyes of many were rimmed with black, and looked not unlike those of certain damsels who disfigure their faces in some heathenish way by dyeing their eyelids.

"Excuse me, Miss Richards," said one man, politely, "but I hadn't a moment to change my dress. Nanno is

away, and I was obliged to put the six boys to bed before I came, and to go to the sale before that."

"Mally can't come because she is seeing to the five girls," apologised another. "She told me to tell you how sorry she is, Miss Edith."

May watched and listened, and afterwards learned that a family of boys was considered a fortune in itself, because they could all work in the pit when old enough; whereas girls were reckoned a misfortune. The apologist, however, had become reconciled to his, because the youngest was the prettiest child in the parish.

That singing-class was a lesson in itself. It had been held, together with the Sunday-school, by members of Mr. Richards's family for nearly half a century, and many of its pupils had received no education save what they derived from them; for there were no board schools in those days, and the national and parish school was not only far off but interfered with the youthful bread-winners. Uncle Laban, for instance, was indebted for the rudiments of all he knew to these classes, and Meredith owed much to them. But they were possessed of superior abilities, and, by dint of self-culture, and making the most of their opportunities, were, like Evan, considered as miracles of learning. Laban had been placed by his master in a responsible position, and he had great hopes that Meredith would walk in his steps, if only the lad could be kept at home and would stick to his work. At any rate he stuck to his classes, from which he was never absent.

On this occasion, Miss Richards took the harmonium and Edith joined the choir, having first taken possession of May. Their mother and intermediate sisters were otherwise engaged. Little May's heart leapt to her mouth when Uncle Laban, waving a roll that he held in his hand, said slowly, "One—two—three," and stamped his foot; while Meredith pitched the key by a sort of scale, and harmonium and choir began. They were practising one of Handel's Choruses, and had the great

composer been present he must have been rejoiced to hear his magnificent work rendered with precision and skill by a choir of labourers, most of whom came from the pit's mouth.

May could no more help singing than she could help breathing; and she, like the rest, began to watch Uncle Laban's movements, and to sway her little head and move her hands much as he did. Fortunately the singers were too intent on their music and their leader to remark her; but Edith found it difficult to smother her laughter, though May's enthusiasm was scarcely greater than that of other juvenile members of the choir. There were several stunted boys whose white faces kindled with the music. One of these especially looked almost inspired. They called him Little Davy, for although he was fourteen he did not look more than ten, having been at work in the coal pit since he was eight. This was contrary to rule, thirteen being the prescribed age; but parents will, now and again, evade the law, as they do the School Board, to utilise their children for bread. It is much the same in town and country—factory and mine—London street or Derwen coal pit. Only the offspring of the agricultural labourer seem robust, red-cheeked, and happy.

The practice was supposed to conclude at nine o'clock, but every one seemed to have some pet morsel that he wished to try, and "Oh! Miss Richards, may we just go over this?" or "Miss Edith, *fach*, may we sing this before we go?" extended it to nearly ten. Still May was wide awake, and when "positively the last" piece was sung she was so much excited that Edith could with difficulty restrain her. She seemed on the point of dancing, albeit what they sung was a curious old Welsh hymn, which sounded more like a wail than a psalm. Had a clever artist been present, he would have made a marvellous sketch of the score of men and boys, all with their mouths well open, their eyes either uplifted or glued to their music—some surrounding the harmonium, others facing Laban, all carried away by the strange wild

dirge. It concluded with a prolonged note, that diminished in sound till it finally ceased—much as Mr. Leslie's choir were wont to conclude their highly-finished performances.

"Now you must sing us a little song," said Edith to May, placing the child in the midst of the group.

She obeyed instantly, and not only did she begin to sing but to dance also. Catching up her skirts and standing on tiptoe, she performed a variety of marvellous evolutions to her own accompaniment, as she sang distinctly the following little verse :—

> "I am the May Queen!
> Dance with me, dance with me
> All round the Maypole,
> Merrily, merrily."

It is needless to say that this exhibition arrested the choir. They were amazed at the performance, and enchanted with the grace of the little dancer; they even began to applaud, which caused May to exert herself more and more.

"Enough! enough! I am sorry I brought her," came suddenly from Evan's decided voice.

"Just five minutes more," pleaded Edith.

But Evan stepped forth from his place with a stern, "May, come here!" and the child danced into his arms.

"Let me carry her home, grandfather," said Meredith. "She is like a fairy with golden hair in threads, and we must not check her, or maybe she'll disappear for ever."

There was awe in the lad's voice, for he had met with some old legendary tales in which he quite believed.

"Come this way, Evan, and you, Meredith," said Miss Edith, leading the way to the dining-room, where she produced a large piece of cake for May.

"She will be best at home in future, Miss Edith. Thank you all the same for asking her," said Evan; and it was many a long day before May again appeared at the choir practice.

CHAPTER VI.

TERPSICHORE AND THE WREATH.

THE next few weeks passed happily enough for May. She trotted about after her elders, watching them, striving to understand her grandmother, making believe to do much and saying little. She saw Meredith most days, and her other relatives and neighbours occasionally, but she neither sang nor danced, save when she was quite alone with Terpsichore. She had an intuitive perception that her exhibition at the class had displeased her grandfather, of whom she stood in much awe. She shrank equally from rebuke and ridicule, and, dreading both with the nervous terror of a sensitive nature, she became ever more chary of speech and more ready in nods. September came on, with the harvest, always late amongst the hills, and she felt very important in being allowed to take her grandfather's dinner into his one wheat-field, where he remained from morning till evening, reaping or gathering up the sheaves, despite rheumatism. Meredith came to help whenever he had a spare hour, and his sisters, Leah and Rachel, also came when they could be spared at home. May was somewhat afraid of these damsels, who were nearly grown up, and, if the truth must be told, jealous of her. They had been hitherto their grandmother's pets, and they did not care to have a rival at Derwen Fach. May had not, as yet, been to their house; indeed, she had been nowhere save to church and the Miss Richards's Sunday-school. She had learned that they and Meredith were sole survivors of a large family, and that Uncle Laban doated upon them, and loved all children dearly for the sake of those whom he had lost.

One evening May was seated near the door on a low three-legged stool which was appropriated to her, as it had

been to her mother before her, with a needle and thread in one hand and a piece of Welsh flannel in the other. She was making an apron for herself, and her attempts at stitches amused her grandmother, who did two to her one. She had not been taught the useful art of needlework, so she was but a beginner. Her grandfather had told her that she should have a striped flannel apron in which to assist in the dairy and kitchen as soon as she could make it, and her eagerness was great. He came in while she was thus employed, and laid his hand on her head, thus pressing down the golden puzzle. The sun looked in upon her from above the opposite hill-tops, and the sweet peace of evening was over the scene. The cat was purring in her lap; for she had made friends both with her and Hedfa, and she was so intent on her work that she did not see Meredith ascend the garden steps or Miss Edith open the wicket-gate behind him. They both entered, however, and the one whispered, "My fairy queen's at work," while the other stooped to kiss the cheek, slightly flushed by the excitement of labour and the glow of the setting sun.

Miss Edith was greeted by all with respectful pleasure, and returned the greeting with the affectionate freedom of one who considered her neighbours her friends. She took a small packet of letters from her pocket, as she seated herself at the round table.

"I have heard from Mr. Everton at last," she began. "He says that he has only just completed his inquiries, being much engaged. I will read you his letter."

Evan and Peggy sat down on the settle, and Meredith, forgotten for the moment, stood by the open door, close to May, who was so intent on her work that she had not attempted to understand the Welsh conversation passing so near her. But the letter was in English, and her work soon dropped from her little hands, as the contents reached her. As Peggy did not understand them, Evan translated them; and the mingled exclamations in the two languages, and the gestures that accompanied them, terrified poor May.

Mr. Everton had taken much pains to learn something of May's history previous to her mother's death, and the result of his research was, briefly, as follows:—

Mr. Goldworthy, May's father, an artist by profession, was said to have left England in search of employment or improvement some four years before his wife's death. As she had never named him to her landlady, and paid regularly for her small apartment, nothing more was ascertained concerning him. But poverty began to creep in at the door, when it chanced that May's remarkable head attracted the attention of a young artist who had known her father, and he asked to be allowed to paint it, volunteering to pay so much an hour for the privilege.

"I remember! it was so!" suddenly exclaimed May at this point of the letter; and, starting up, put herself into a pretty attitude, there in the departing daylight.

Thus she had stood, it would seem, with her white arms arched over her head, when she became a little artist's model to procure food for her mother and herself.

"Perhaps you will read the next in Welsh, Miss Edith," said Evan severely; while Meredith whispered, "come to me my fairy queen. Grandfather's angry," and May shrank back to him she called cousin-uncle.

Miss Edith translated the remainder of the letter, and May only caught a word here and there, but Meredith understood it all.

It proceeded to recount how that, during the child's sittings, the manager of one of the principal London theatres saw her. He was preparing for a Christmas pantomime.

Here Mr. Everton made a diversion to explain that for some time before Christmas the doors of the theatres were besieged by poor women, who thankfully let out their children at so much a week to appear nightly in the pantomimes that were to amuse, but not to edify, the rich. Thus, for a few shillings per week, these young creatures were bedizened with all sorts of finery, twisted into every conceivable shape, and kept up half the night.

"You country ladies little know what our city children go through," wrote Mr. Everton.

The biting tooth of the hungry wolf, poverty, terrified Mrs. Goldworthy into accepting an offer from the manager aforesaid that her child should act in his Christmas pantomime at four shillings a week. She was at once put in training, and her remarkable grace and aptness caused her to appear as the principal character, The May Queen. She understood but little of the dangers and temptations of the life she had begun; she only knew that her small earnings comforted her sickly mother; that everybody was kind to her and gave her flowers and sweets, and that she made up for loss of rest at night by sleeping in the day. She prized lightly the golden hair that everyone admired, the hawthorn crown, or white satin dress; but she dearly loved the doll ballet-dancer that some lady had given her and had taught her with difficulty to call Terpsichore.

Such was May's pathetic little story until her poor mother died, whom she dearly loved. Previously to this sad event their landlady had asked Mr. Everton to visit her, and he had found that, in spite of contradictory circumstances, she was unshaken in the faith of her grandfather, and passed away rejoicing in a Saviour's love.

"Thank God for that!" groaned Evan, while Meredith laid his hand protectingly on May's head.

"Of course this accounts for the dear child's pretty ways, her dancing and singing and attitudes," remarked Miss Edith, as she concluded the letter, and was still looking at the "Yours very faithfully," written in the bold but hurried characters of one who met with daily cases as sad or sadder than the child's.

"We will have no more of them," returned Evan. "Peggy, bring me that tawdry doll and the made flowers which the child wore on her frizzled head. That must be washed and combed straight, too."

Peggy dared not disobey, so she went in the next room

and returned with Terpsichore and the wreath, which Evan took from her hands, and the sight of which caused May to run towards Miss Edith, and Meredith to move forwards. In another moment these relics of the child's past were cast upon the fire.

A shriek so piercing echoed through the room that even Evan drew back aghast. It was as if the child herself was in the flames. "Terpsichore! Terpsichore! Take her out! Take her out!" she screamed, rushing to the fire and almost throwing herself upon it. But Meredith had been before her. He held her back with one hand, while with the other he rescued her beloved Terpsichore. Happily the wreath had fallen underneath and caught the flames, but the doll was unscathed. Meredith's face was aflame with passion as he pushed past his grandfather, muttering "Shame!" and ran out of the house with the doll in his hand. May followed, heedless of all but this, to her, living treasure. Her shrieks had not subsided, and terror winged her little feet.

"Go back; I will take care of her," said Meredith, pausing a moment.

"He will kill me. He will throw me on the fire," she replied, hurrying past him, yet looking back at her doll.

The trio in the cottage rose in consternation and hastened to the doorway, but the fugitives were out of sight amongst the oaks almost before they could glance after them. Evan's face was stern, Peggy's and Edith's alarmed. He had forgotten the presence of the little girl in his desire to eradicate all memory of a childhood which seemed to him exceeding sinful. How could he understand the love of a child for an inanimate doll?

"It was a living friend to her, Evan," explained Miss Edith, gently. "You did not know how cruel you were."

"Perhaps not; but cruelty is sometimes kindness," replied Evan. "That boy will never come to good. He is disobedient at heart. Did you see how he defied me?"

"He is young, and his sympathy was with May. So

indeed was mine, Evan. I will go after them," said Edith, gathering up her letters.

"Meredith will take care of her," whispered Peggy, as Edith left the house. "They will be sure to go to Laban's."

Peggy was right. As soon as they were quite out of sight of the cottage and in the oak wood Meredith paused, and, taking May's hand, soothed her—first by placing Terpsichore in her arms, and then by assuring her that no one should hurt her.

"But great-grandfather will kill you," she cried, tears streaming from her terrified eyes.

"No, he won't. The worst he can do is to flog me, and I don't mind that," he replied.

She trembled so, that he found she could not keep pace with him, and he therefore took her up in his arms, and carried her through the gloomy wood, past the pit, where others were watching and working at that moment and where the engine was snorting, and into the district where the colliers dwelt. This was wild in the extreme, consisting of cottages, either scattered over a barren mountain side, or seated, like Laban's, near a mountain torrent of a stream that rushed over rocks below his elevated dwelling. A short, steep path by the side of the stream led to this, ascending which Meredith and May found themselves at its door. He put her down and entered, leading her by the hand.

"I have brought little cousin to see you, mother, since yon are too weak to pay her a visit," he said, boldly. "Grandfather was cross, and we both ran away from him. He nearly frightened her to death."

"Very glad to see her, I'm sure; but what can I do with her?" said a wailing voice from out a great bee-hive chair near the fire.

'Lizbeth, Laban's wife, was an invalid, and, being very nervous, was much considered, and allowed to have her own way in everything.

"Now we shall see what she's made of," said Rachel,

who was preparing supper; and "She's nothing but a circus girl," put in Leah, who was adjusting her collar in a glass that hung against the wall.

Leah, although full young, was already thinking of getting married. The colliers marry early, for the young men are able to earn a livelihood when quite juvenile, and consider themselves capable of supporting a wife as soon as they are in full pay. This was contrary to Evan's ideas, who considered that a youth ought, at least, to be full grown before he undertook the responsibilities of matrimony; and, indeed, Laban was not in favour of it; but he and 'Lizbeth had lost so many children that he was over-indulgent to the three that remained to them. Thus Leah was engaged before she was seventeen, and was expecting her intended when May arrived, She was a good housekeeper, and it was prophesied would make a careful and managing wife; which, unfortunately, these young women too frequently were not. Indeed the untidy households at home too often drove the husbands to the public-house.

"What has grandfather been doing now?" asked 'Lizbeth, in a querulous voice, as Meredith placed May between her and the fire, and she felt how tremulous and cold the child was.

Meredith explained, and the feeble but kindly woman took her upon her lap, rubbed her little hands and kissed her, which made her tears flow afresh.

"Old people don't understand such little ones," said Rachel, kneeling down by her mother's chair and caressing May. "Let her stay here, and I'll take care of her."

Here Miss Edith entered, breathless. She did not stop a minute; but, seeing the child was safe, hurried off again, followed by Meredith, who insisted on being her protector to Derwen Fawr. May looked wistfully after her two friends, but ere long she was overcome by the warmth of the fire and the effects of her previous terror and fatigue, and sobbed herself to sleep in 'Lizbeth's motherly arms.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST PENNY.

THE following morning May was again seated on Aunt 'Lizbeth's lap in the beehive chair. It pleased Uncle Laban and comforted his wife to see her there. They breakfasted at peep of day, and all the family happened to be present. The events of the previous evening were freely discussed, and May, understanding intuitively what they were talking of, listened, and took in much through her sharp little ears. Laban said decidedly that he would take her back to his father, since Meredith declined to do so; while 'Lizbeth urged that she should remain with them at Tygwyn, or White House, for a few days at least, saying that she was sure she was not well. The young people put it to May to decide. It was long before they could draw forth any kind of answer, for she appeared to be weighing the pros and cons in an unnaturally wise manner. She had previously been examining the room, and certainly that alone might have induced her to decide in favour of Aunt 'Lizbeth. The walls were covered with ornaments, and there was quite a handsome looking-glass over the mantelpiece. The pictorial history of Joseph and his brethren adorned the room, coloured and gorgeously framed, and beneath the print which represented the fraternal reconciliation stood the harmonium of which Leah had spoken. But all this did not attract May so much as did a variety of children's toys, which were suspended to the walls and window-frames in various fashions. There was an array of tiny, glittering spoons on one side, a wooden horse on another, a wee shelf covered with miniature crockeryware on a third, and, crowning glory, a doll in full dress on a fourth. It was on this that May's eyes rested longest, and Aunt 'Lizbeth

sighed as she perceived it, and murmured, "*Gwen annwyl!*" or "darling Gwen;" for all these treasures, so beautiful in the sight of the living May, had belonged to cousins now in heaven.

"Will you stay with us, my fairy queen?" asked Meredith, seeing at what she was gazing.

She slipped off her aunt's lap and went to him.

"Put Terpsichore up there," she whispered, pointing to the doll in full dress, "and then she will have company. What is that doll's name?"

"Gwenny, I think," replied Meredith.

"Then she can talk to Gwenny, and I will go back to great-grandfather and old Peggy."

She drew Terpsichore carefully from her pocket, and placed it in Meredith's hands, still pointing to the doll on the wall. He and Rachel rose at once, and managed to fasten the dolls side by side. May watched the proceedings with a whispered, "Don't prick her, don't hurt her," and then, with a strong effort to restrain a sob, went back to Aunt 'Lizbeth.

"You won't burn her?" she said, with a little shudder, glancing at Laban.

"She is safe here, my pretty one. Here is a penny to console thee," replied Uncle Laban, with a smile and a sigh, and as soon as breakfast was over he took her back to Derwen Fach.

They found the old people much perplexed. Evan had acknowledged that he had been hasty, though he still held to his opinion that every trace of her former life should be removed from the child.

Peggy grieved in silence over the wreath, which she had much admired.

"I miss her dreadfully," she said, in an aggrieved tone. "She was beginning to be quite useful."

Just as she spoke, May walked in. She approached her grandparents nervously.

"I am sorry if I was naughty," she said; "so is cousin Meredith. Terpsichore won't come back.

"I am sorry if I was naughty," she said.

She is going to stay with a friend because she is afraid of the fire."

Evan sat down upon the settle, drew May between his knees, and kissed her. He muttered a few words to the effect that she was a good child, but that she must still have her hair brushed smooth, and then left her alone with Peggy, who began to question her concerning the past evening. But her Welsh was unequal to the occasion, and she could only reply by a succession of nods and shakes of the head.

Evan met Laban, who had stood outside the house to watch the interview between May and his father.

"Where is Meredith? Why didn't he bring the child back?" asked Evan.

"He has just gone to bed, father. It was his turn up last night."

"He went home with Miss Edith; she told me so; staying outside my gate like a coward, while she ran in to let us know the child was safe with you. He must have been late for the pit. Take you care, Laban, or he will turn out ill."

"I hope not, father. He is high-spirited, and likes roaming about above ground better than work below; and I don't wonder. He is all for his books, besides, and reads everything he can get hold of."

Evan made no allusion to the incident of the previous evening, and father and son separated to pursue their various occupations.

May, meanwhile, busied herself about many matters that she had watched her grandmother perform; amongst them she took upon herself to lay the cloth while Peggy was in the dairy, and the old woman pointed out to Evan, with pride, the neatness and precision she had shown in the act. He said that she was quick enough of apprehension and imitation, and could now be trained into a useful woman. "But," he added, "you must wash and brush and comb her hair first."

Accordingly, when the dinner was over and the house

tidied up, Peggy placed a good-sized brown pan before the fire, filled it with warm water, and gave May to understand her head was to be washed. This was a proceeding to which she had been accustomed all her life, so she enveloped herself in a large flannel apron, and began the operation herself. Peggy assisted as well as she could, but, being short of breath and stout of body, she soon gladly relinquished the task to May, who soaped and soused the offending hair as if she enjoyed it. This first process over, she seated herself on her little stool before the fire at her grandmother's knees, and allowed her to rub it with a rough cloth. It was not long in drying, and, to Peggy's dismay, the delicate threads bristled more and more. Evan came in, and this fact was pointed out to him; indeed, it was only too apparent there in the firelight. May submitted to the brushing and combing process with Spartan firmness; but the more Peggy brushed the more wig-like rose the hair, and each tooth of the comb only broke a golden link.

"Just as well try to comb out a skein of tangled thread," said Peggy, throwing down her implements in a pet.

"Let it alone, woman. Let it alone. The child is right; it was born so," cried Evan.

"Mamma washed it every morning," sighed May. "It won't be smooth like other little girls' hair. I wish it would. Terpsichore's is." She looked wistfully at her grandfather, who turned quickly away, and told his wife he was ready for his tea.

But when the meal was prepared, he was not slow to perceive that May did not eat, and that she looked weary and listless. This made him uneasy, and he asked her how she was more than once.

"Quite well, please, great-grandfather," she replied, with a melancholy shake of the head, which Evan took for a reproach, though it was not meant as such. Before tea was over Miss Richards and her sisters, Edith and Sophy, came in. May's face brightened up, and she was

soon at Edith's side, who had brought her a coloured picture to replace her doll.

The elders were soon in earnest conversation, for Miss Richards had come to consult Evan about a matter of general interest. It had been long in contemplation to build a commodious room, or sort of school-church, near Derwen Fawr, that should serve not only for a general schoolroom, but for religious services, an institute, and place of meeting for the neighbourhood generally. The distance of the parish church was too often an excuse for the non-attendance of the people, and it was hoped and believed that a suitable building within easy reach might attract them to spend their evenings profitably in reading, practise of part-singing, lectures and religious instruction, instead of wasting time, and money, and health in the ale-house. The lord of the manor had just written to Mr. Richards to promise him the land for this building, and Miss Richards had come to tell Evan the good news. She was her father's factotum, and opened and answered his letters during his frequent absences from home. He had shares in mines and quarries in different parts of Wales, and was, therefore, not so much at Derwen Fach as his wife and children wished. Laban acted as his overseer, and was, like his father, a person of importance in the district.

"We have now only to set to work to collect the money for the building," said Miss Richards, when the question of the land had been discussed.

"We must have it in hand before we begin. I'm for 'counting the cost.' The parsons are too apt to get into debt," remarked oracular Evan.

"But they work in faith; why cannot we?" asked Edith, who was all for sending at once for architect, masons, and carpenters, and beginning the work.

"We must have an estimate first, Miss Edith; then we shall know how much money we want. But we can, at least, begin to collect from the neighbours," said Evan.

May had been listening intently to this conversation,

understanding little or nothing. But when Edith spoke she looked into her face so inquiringly that Edith explained to her in English what had passed.

"And we shall have newspapers and magazines and books and tea and coffee, if we can, and a harmonium, and I don't know what besides, if only we can get the money! and Meredith as secretary," she said, rapidly.

"And religious services, at which the vicar will assist when he can," added Evan.

"And the study of Holy Scripture," supplemented Miss Richards.

"And all sorts of treats," put in Miss Sophy, who was of a more volatile turn of mind than her sisters.

May's hand was fumbling in her little pocket. She drew forth something which she slipped shyly into Edith's hand, with the words, "To help to make the big room." It was the penny Uncle Laban had given her that morning.

"Our first subscription!" exclaimed Edith, holding it up. "We will put it under the foundation-stone," and then, while the others were commenting on this graceful action, she kissed the abashed child. "How cold she is!" And all of a tremble. Peggy, she cannot be well," she added, in Welsh.

"That is just what I have been thinking, for she has scarcely touched her bread and milk," returned Evan, whose best feelings were aroused by May's little donation.

Edith led her to the fire and tried to warm her, but she shivered so perceptibly that she found it of no avail.

"She took cold last night, I dare say," remarked Peggy, "and I'll warrant this head-washing has finished it."

This was a thrust at Evan, against whose somewhat arbitrary commands she would have ocasionally rebelled if she could; but she was too obedient a wife, and had too wholesome a fear of her husband, to do so openly. He understood her, however.

"I am afraid I was hasty," he said. "Make the child a posset and let her go to bed."

While this passed, Miss Edith was asking May if her head ached, and being informed in confidential whispers that it did.

"Do you think Terpsichore's aches too?" inquired May.

"I am quite sure it does not; and yours will be well to-morrow if you will take a dose that I will bring you," replied Edith, rising and telling Peggy that she was sure a few spoonfuls of her mother's pick-me-up would be more efficacious than a posset.

The young ladies took their departure, after each had fondled May in her own particular manner. The child looked wistfully after them, but said never a word.

"I wish George was here," said Evan, rubbing his head.

George was one of Evan's many descendants, who was a young doctor, and was likely to come to reside in the neighbourhood, Mr. Richards having offered him the post of surgeon to his miners.

"Mrs. Richards is better than an oaf of a boy like George," responded Peggy, who was feeling irritable, and who was helping the still trembling May to undress by the fire.

Mrs. Richards was, indeed, as good as a medical man, for she had made medicine a study with a view to helping the poor, when female M.D.'s were unheard of. It was to her, principally, that her daughters owed their useful education, and it was she who had early inculcated into their minds that they could find scope for all their energies in the sphere in which they were born. She said they had only to look around them, and they would find plenty of extraneous work; while, at home, they were the greatest comforts and helps to their father and herself.

She returned with Edith to see May. They found the child in bed, covered up, as it would seem, with all the clothing the house contained, Peggy's scarlet cloak on the top of it.

"She is very feverish, in spite of the shivers," said Mrs. Richards; "and we must take off all this heap of

clothes. I think you may venture to give her the effervescent dose, Edith."

May was caressing Edith's hand much as she was accustomed to do her doll; but she let it go, and obediently swallowed the not unpleasant medicine her friends had brought her. Mrs. Richards thought that old Peggy should have some younger person with her, and Edith asked to be allowed to remain until May fell asleep. The request was granted, and Edith seated herself by the crib. But May was far too restless and excited to sleep. All the events that had been crowded into her young life during the last two or three months, which had culminated in that of the previous evening, had overpowered the silent, self-contained child, and resulted in an attack of fever. By degrees the pale, wan, little face grew flushed, and the limbs burning, while the restless head, with its offending golden hair, tossed hither and thither on the snow-white pillow.

CHAPTER VIII.

FEVER.

May's fever increased day by day, and she grew delirious, so that her shining "golden fleece" had to be shorn. When the old man saw the fluff of silken threads laid aside upon the drawers he wept over them; nay more, he actually took them up and pressed them to his lips. "If the child is taken perhaps it will be my fault," he groaned, as he remembered her shriek and flight into the dewy evening. But self-reproaches soon merged into a strong desire to save the tender blossom hitherto so roughly nourished. Unflinching sternness, petty jealousies, doubtful prejudices—all fell as weeds before the sickle at sight

of the pretty, prostrate flower. Leah and Rachel took turns in watching by her bedside both by night and day. Meredith came and went unnoticed by his grandfather; the Misses Richards were in and out continually. All the neighbours were anxious about the strange little girl, and clergy and laity united to comfort Evan. But the child had gained his affection in spite of his opposition to her pre-acquired tastes, and he reproached himself for needless harshness, so he would not be comforted. The vicar reasoned with him in vain, for although he believed that if May were taken she would be another lamb safe in the dear Shepherd's fold, he could not let her enter without her forgiveness. Yes, "forgiveness" was the word he used.

And she, in her delirium, wandered more in the past than the present. She was always with her mother, and seemed happy in talking of her wreath, her dancing, and the shillings she earned. She would sing snatches—not only of her May Queen songs, but of hymns, and this comforted Evan. Mr. Everton was often on her lips, and she connected him with her mother in heaven. "I shall see you if I am good, mammie," she said, more than once. Miss Edith and Meredith also were now and then the themes of her excited talk, but, strange to say, she never mentioned either Evan or her doll. It seemed as if she were afraid of that subject even in her delirium. Yet she had a sort of perception when Meredith was near her, and would be soothed for a moment when he murmured a passage of a hymn or a bit of Handel.

"Sing her *Merch Megan*," said Evan to him, one day. They were the first words he had spoken to him since he had rescued Terpsichore.

Meredith sang the air in a low, clear voice. She was conscious for a moment, and opened her arms with the words, "Here is your little Megan, mamma." She did not know that it was her cousin's, not her mother's, neck that she clasped. And so the days wore on.

Before the crisis, George Morrison arrived, the young

doctor already referred to as one of Evan's numerous family. Although he was to make his abode at some distance, amongst the miners scattered over the mountain-side, he was summoned to see the child. He said that all had been done by Mrs. Richards that could be done, but that she must be kept from all excitement. Accordingly, Miss Edith took upon herself to see that one person alone should be with her at a time, for she knew how difficult it was to keep the sick-rooms of the cottagers from a constant influx of visitors. Friends and neighbours crowd in with offers of aid or sympathy, and often retard recovery by over-zeal. Edith, therefore, did much of the nursing by day, and thus enabled Evan, Peggy, and the rest to perform their necessary avocations, which cannot be intermitted even in sight of death. The two cows had to be milked, the poultry fed, the sheep on the hills reckoned, the wheat-mow thatched, the mines worked, even while the fatal scythe was suspended over the head of the orphaned little one.

May wanted nothing that was not provided; for Mrs. Richards took care that the sick should be nourished, and Evan would have spent his last penny to save the child. She was, indeed, better off in this respect than she could have been in London, where it is impossible to relieve the multitudes of sick and dying ever needing help in that huge metropolis. But in spite of care and hourly watching, the fever seemed only to increase, and with it the small frame diminished. However, the crisis was at hand, and the one great anxiety appeared to be whether the sleep which had fled from the weary little eyes would visit them when that crisis was past.

Not a sound was heard in the little farm, save the child's occasional delirious utterances, for she was getting too weak even for these. Her friends crept in and out of the house like stealthy cats, and Miss Edith alone was in the sick chamber.

Evan met Meredith watching at the door at the moment he should have been in bed.

"Grandfather, may she have her doll back again?" asked the lad. "It will perhaps comfort her when she is conscious."

"Of course she may," replied Evan, who had never looked on the matter in this light.

"I am sorry that I offended you, grandfather," continued Meredith, drawing a parcel carefully enveloped in white paper from his pocket. "Will you give her this yourself and shake hands with me?"

He unfastened the parcel and produced Terpsichore, whom he had been carrying in his pocket for many days. Evan recoiled at the sight, but took the doll into his rough left hand, and gave the right to his grandson. Not a word more was spoken. Evan returned to the house, and Meredith crept round to the lattice-window of the bedroom, which was open, and through an uncurtained corner of which he was able to peep and just catch sight of May's poor little face.

Evan took off his shoes and stole into the room. Peggy was seated in a corner, motionless and half-asleep. Edith was near the crib, May's hand in hers. The child was unconscious. So quiet was Evan that the watchers did not hear him. He reached the crib, and silently placed the now faded doll in May's arm as it lay outside the patchwork coverlet. Her eyes unclosed, she looked at Evan, and he was sure there was recognition in the look. She smiled, withdrew her hand from Edith's, and clasped the doll as if by instinct, then the heavy lids again closed over the blue eyes. In a few minutes more she was asleep.

That sleep, with God's blessing on it, saved her life. No one knew how long she slept, but during the blessed time her breathing and pulse became more regular, and hope dawned for her anxious friends. The crisis was passed in that slumber, and when at last she awoke she was conscious. She knew those who surrounded her, and these were her grandparents and Edith. Her first, scarcely-audible word was "Great-grandfather." He

stooped over her and kissed her. She was trying to articulate something more, which he construed into a request that he should also kiss Terpsichore, which he accordingly did. She smiled, but she was too weak to return the embrace. Indeed, she could not move, but she became suddenly more communicative than she had previously been. Amongst other matters she confided to Edith that she wished her to write to Mr. Everton, and told her exactly what she wanted to say. Her kind friend wrote it in her own words.

"Say that I can't write to him, because I am poorly, and I can't go and see him," she said, remembering her promise at Paddington. "I want him to come and see me, and you, and all of us, and to help to build the big room, because he is a clergyman. Tell him I try to be good, for I want to see mamma again. Give my love to Mrs. Pope"—this was the landlady—"and say I can sing more hymns, and that Terpsichore is very well now, but has been poorly, like me. Say that perhaps I am going to Heaven."

"What is Mr. Everton like?" asked Edith, when there came a pause in May's dictation, at this clause.

"Oh! he is so pretty, Miss Edith!" whispered the child. "He has such kind eyes. I think he is like mamma—and—and Terpsichore!" she added, uncovering her doll's face, and displaying meaningless blue eyes, a flaxen wig, and rosy cheeks and lips.

Miss Edith laughed. She had been drawn into a long correspondence with May's friend, not knowing whether he were young or old, handsome or ugly. But she liked and admired his letters, from which not only she but her mother and sisters drew the conclusion that he was a Christian and a gentleman. From his bold, steady, clear handwriting, she was inclined to imagine him young: while from the subdued and almost fatherly tone of his letters, she concluded him old. She had read them over and over again, and tried to picture the writer, as one strives to paint a friend or relative whom one has

never seen, in some distant land. In her replies she had not only written her best, but taken great pains with her diction, for it was an event in her young and retired life to be corresponding with a stranger on a subject which was both pathetic and peculiar. Accordingly, she intended to take the rough draft of May's letter home, in order to re-copy it; for she was obliged to write it on a half-sheet of paper with a scratchy pen and very brown ink. But this did not satisfy the child. With the irritable excitement of sickness, she must have it enclosed in an envelope, directed, and stamped before her face, so that Edith had not time even to make an apology.

"But how am I to end it?" she asked.

May considered a few moments, then said—

"'Your obedient little servant, May.' That was how Mrs. Pope wrote when she asked him to come to mamma."

And so the letter went.

When the actual, immediate danger was over, Miss Edith came only occasionally; for she had many other duties to perform. But May's grandparents were very tender of her, and her cousins very kind—Meredith especially. He would come at every odd minute to sit by her, talk or read to her, nurse and amuse her. The wistful little eyes watched for him, and welcomed him when he came with a pleased expression that repaid him. She never seemed to tire of one particular theme, and her first question always was, "When will they build the big room?" He was, fortunately, able to report progress, and when Evan learnt how interested she was in what was a cause of general interest, he also began to talk to her of this, to him, darling theme. Thus the little crib became the rallying point for all who had news to bring of donations and subscriptions towards this much desired building.

It was long before May was able to quit this—her haven; for she had received a severe shock to her slight and delicate frame, and cousin George, the young doctor, ordered her to be kept warm and quiet, to be well

fed, and on no account excited. Winter was against her, for it was impossible to know how she would bear the damp and cold of the hill-country after the smoky closeness of London. However, she left her crib at last, and she never forgot her return to that kitchen whence she had run away after Terpsichore.

It was afternoon; the work was done, the doors were closed, the settle was drawn opposite the fire, the tea-table spread, and Hedfa and the cat were asleep on the hearth; they had been May's frequent guests during her illness. Evan and Peggy brought the invalid in between them and laid her on the settle, previously spread with pillows and blankets.

"I am quite well now, great-grandfather," she exclaimed, sitting up. "Now I can help you to do all the work, great-grandmother."

Old Peggy burst out laughing, and May joined. It seemed to the old people as if she had never laughed before.

"God bless thee, child; and thank Him for giving thee back to us," said Evan, uplifting his hands. He was about to lay them on her head, but drew back when he perceived what a short little crop of hair she had.

"It is growing, and I think it will be smooth," she said, humbly.

"Let it grow as it will," replied Evan.

Never was there a happier tea-table. May's pinched little face expanded, and she seemed at home at last. Suddenly she put a question that puzzled her grandfather and accounted for a word used occasionally in her delirium.

"Will Armageddon go into the big room," she asked.

"No, for it is to be a great battle, and we will have no fighting there," he answered, not remembering that this word had been used while May was a silent listener at Miss Richards's class.

Meredith came in, and brought welcome news of a handsome donation from a neighbouring squire. He greeted May with delight, and it was to her that he first communicated it.

"Miss Richards says that the foundation-stone can be laid in the spring, and that May's penny shall be put under it," he continued, eagerly. "I have been examining the ground. That disused pit isn't far off, and I went again to look at it. I am sure there is a seam of coal close by, if anyone had the courage to sink a new shaft."

"I wish you would cease your speculations, and stick to work," reproved Evan.

"I should like to sell all we have and buy the field, like the man who bought the hidden treasure in the parable," argued Meredith.

"I hope I shall be well to see my penny put under the stone," whispered May to Peggy while this was passing, and so ended what might have been a dispute between Evan and Meredith.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BIG ROOM.

It took the best part of two years to collect the money and build the large room so much desired by the inhabitants of Derwen Fawr. But perseverance in what is really good and useful is generally rewarded, and it was finished at last. Many a coin earned and saved with difficulty went towards "buying a brick" in this building, and May's first penny seemed to give an impetus to people young and old, not to despise the "day of small things;" for boxes were kept by most of the colliers, into which stray pence found their way; and these boxes, when opened, contained considerable sums. That same penny was duly placed under the foundation-stone, together with some new coins, to mark the date, and every farthing subsequently presented to May was dropped into the box

which stood on the window-sill close by the large Bible, at Derwen Fach. A tithe of all Evan and Peggy's earnings was joined to these small offerings, and "The Lord's Box," as Evan reverently called it, had to be frequently opened and emptied because it was often full.

It was a proud day when the room was opened, and no

"She danced over the hay-fields for joy."

one in the district was prouder, happier, or busier than May Goldworthy. As she and her grandparents approached the structure on the halcyon morn, she danced over the hayfields for joy, and Evan, whose hand she held, did not reproach her. She was no longer dressed in

shabby black, but had on a neat white frock and tippet spotted with blue, and a broad straw hat surrounded by a blue ribbon. The fashion of dressing children in Welsh costume was passing away, so she had not, as yet, the pleasure of wearing a tall hat and scarlet cloak like her imaginary Mother Hubbard. She had grown, of course, since her illness, but she was still small and pale, despite the many basins of bread and milk and oatmeal porridge she ate with appetite. The golden hair was certainly smoother than when she made her appearance at Derwen, though it still bristled and fluffed, in spite of her best efforts to keep it in order.

"See how the sun shines upon it! Hear how glad the birds are! Look what lots of people!" she cried, as they drew near the handsome and picturesquely situated fabric they were about to assist in declaring open to the neighbourhood, and belonging to its inhabitants.

Perhaps it owed more to its position than its architecture, though it was sufficiently ornamental for its purpose. Stability and usefulness had been the objects of its founders, and it was thoroughly well built, large, and commodious, with an ornamental small bell-tower, in which one sonorous bell was moving and sounding as the people were pouring in at its doors. But the site was glorious. It stood alone in a retired corner, surrounded by giant oaks and still more gigantic hills. The melody of a brook united with that of birds to inaugurate the thanksgiving about to be poured forth to the Great Inspirer of all good works, and it was not astonishing that May should repeat the words, "Hark to the birds, great-grandfather! They are praising the Lord for our beautiful room."

"Child, prepare thy heart to praise Him also," said Evan.

"Yes," responded May, with one of her customary nods.

It was a great day for Mr. Richards and his family, who had invited all the neighbouring clergy and gentry to be present. There was, therefore, a goodly gathering,

and the room, though ample, was crowded, not only by these guests, but more especially by the colliers, for whose benefit it was built. They had worked double time the previous day to ensure a holiday on this, and such as were compelled to remain in or about the pit had so arranged that half should be at the morning and the remainder at the evening services. These were to be, in a great measure, choral, and when May entered the room she walked straight to a platform at the upper end of it, where Miss Richards was seated at the harmonium, surrounded by her large choir. May always sat by Edith, and knew exactly her place, for they had gone through the programme frequently in that spot to ensure proficiency on this glad day. She now belonged to the choir, although she was not considered strong enough often to attend the practice of an evening; but the young ladies took pains to atone for this at more convenient seasons.

"Look at our roses, Miss Edith," whispered May, when she had knelt, and in her own words asked for a blessing on "the big room," as she still called it.

The floral decorations were very pretty, and the roses alluded to were white, and had been fashioned into a small wreath by Edith and May, which the latter not unnaturally associated with her lost hawthorn crown.

"But they are real, and mine was only make-believe," she had said to Meredith, with a sigh, as he helped them to fasten the wreath round the reading-desk.

Of course, he and his father—the one as leader, the other as tenor—were in the choir on the opening day. Two years had not only settled Meredith's voice, but had made almost a man of him.

Every inch of the room was full, when the choir rose and began Bishop Ken's grand old hymn—

> "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
> Praise Him, all creatures here below;
> Praise Him above, ye angelic host;
> Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

In this the whole congregation joined, and as the chorus

of sound poured through the many open windows out into the June sunshine, all nature united with it to praise the "Great Giver of all good things." And no unit of this whole was more in earnest than the child May. She could now speak and sing Welsh readily, therefore was able to join in the services in that and the English tongue, the said services being equally divided into each language, on account of the many English present. It is needless to enumerate the services, but three of the morning hours were piously employed in prayers, sermons, hymns, and chants, which failed to weary the assembly; for the Welsh delight both in music and preaching. The various eloquent addresses drew forth many affirmative responses, and if applause did not succeed the choral efforts, it was because that day was devoted to the praises of God and not of man. An assembly more devout and enthusiastic could scarcely have been gathered together, and when they began to disperse it was found that there were numbers round about the doors and windows for whom there was not even standing place in the room.

The choir and preachers remained seated while the congregation made their slow and difficult exit. May was making her inward comments, and occasionally whispering to Miss Edith, when she suddenly rose with a little cry, and the words, "It is! It is!" And running down the steps of the temporary platform, almost threw herself into the arms of a gentleman who was standing quietly at one side of the room watching the choir.

"Mr. Everton! Mr. Everton!" shrieked the child.

"Yes, little May; I have come to keep my promise," he replied, kissing her cheek. "But you must not cry. Are you not glad to see me?"

"Oh! so glad! so glad, that I can't help crying for joy!" she replied, holding his hand between both of hers.

He sat down on one of the forms, and she stood beside him.

"I am out for my holiday, little May, and since you could not come and see me I have devoted a long day

to coming to see you. And I am glad to have arrived at so happy a time. You must introduce me to your friends. And you are grown, and look—*are* you well, child?"

"Oh, yes! quite well. Are you quite well, sir?"

He smiled, and said the beautiful country and the pure air would soon make him well, but he had been working hard.

"And which is the friend who has so kindly written to me about you, little May?" he asked, looking at the now quickly-emptying platform. "And which are your grandparents?"

"There she is! There is Miss Edith," she replied, quitting him for a moment and joining Edith, who was about to leave the room.

"He has come, Miss Edith. He said he would," she whispered, as her friend looked round to discover what had caused her excitement.

Mr. Everton rose, and joining them, said simply—

"Are you little May's kind friend and my correspondent?"

"Yes, if you are Mr. Everton," replied Edith.

They shook hands warmly, for no further introduction was needed between those who had been, as it seemed, friends for more than two years. A flush of genuine pleasure overspread Edith's face while Mr. Everton was looking at it to see what this, his whilom correspondent was like, and she said frankly that they should all be glad to see him. May, meanwhile, had possessed herself of a hand of each, and seeing that the room was nearly empty, they walked out into the gay scene that surrounded it.

Friends were standing about in groups, and Mr. and Mrs. Richards and their three eldest daughters were going from place to place inviting some to luncheon and others to an afternoon prayer-meeting and subsequent tea, or evening service. Evan and Laban were busy amongst their neighbours, and for the moment Edith and May were forgotten by all but Meredith, who was watching for them. Why did a sharp pang of something akin to

"Are you little May's kind friend?"

jealousy shoot through him as he saw the trio in such earnest and pleased discourse? Nevertheless, he stood aside and waited.

"Papa! Will you come here?" said Edith to a gentleman who was approaching the spot where they stood. "This is the clergyman who wrote to old Evan about his grandchild," she added in a whisper, as Mr. Richards turned round. "My father—Mr. Everton," she continued, and the gentlemen bowed and raised their hats.

Mr. Richards was between fifty and sixty years of age, large, tall, and substantial-looking. He was what people called "a fine man," and he certainly carried weight, both physically and metaphorically, for his word was a heavy law that none sought to break, save, occasionally, old Evan. He was so much preoccupied that he had forgotten all about "Evan's grandchild and the clergyman who wrote to him," and Mr. Everton was, therefore, as much of a stranger to him as was May, who stood trembling by his side. She had imbibed a certain fear of Mr. Richards from the young people about her, to whom he was a sort of *bête noire*, at whose presence they fled. The truth was, he, like many other busy men of this restless age, had more on his shoulders than they could well bear, and was very sharp upon those whose shoulders were not quite so broad as his own.

When he looked, inquiringly, from his daughter to Mr. Everton, she explained matters, pointing to May as she did so.

"Oh, to be sure. I recollect. I wasn't at home at the time," he said, in an absent sort of way. "Very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Everton. You will come and have some luncheon. I am trying in vain to get the people together. Edith, bring Mr. Everton at once; the four o'clock meeting will begin before luncheon is over."

"I hope you will come," said Edith, as her father disappeared. "Our house is not very far."

"Thank you, I shall be glad; but how am I to see May's friends?" he replied.

"There is great-grandfather and Uncle Laban," supplied May, who was struggling with disappointment at the prospect of so speedy a separation from her friend.

"Run and tell them, May," whispered Edith.

The child went, and was not satisfied until she had found, not only the pair mentioned, but her grandmother and Meredith, who all surrounded Mr. Everton, and welcomed him with expressions of grateful joy. Evan's hearty hand-clasp and "God bless you" spoke at once to Mr. Everton, who promised to meet him again that afternoon. There was so much talking and bustle on all sides, that no one noticed May's regretful little face as Mr. Everton and Edith, together with many others, both rich and poor, walked off in the direction of Derwen Fawr. It was open house there for all who came from a distance, and as Evan had been specially asked to head a table in the hall appointed for some of Mr. Richards's men, he also followed.

Meredith came forward and offered his grandmother his arm, and May followed, quite dejected. She could not understand how it was that Mr. Everton, who belonged particularly to her, and had, as she fancied, come all the way from London to see her, should leave her as soon as she had found him.

"Why do you keep behind, May?" asked Meredith.

"Because I am thinking of Mr. Everton," she replied.

"He seems well enough off with Miss Edith," returned Meredith in a huffy voice, and she was left to follow at pleasure.

Her mind was much exercised between Meredith and Mr. Everton during her pensive walk home, for she was beginning to live more in the human beings who surrounded her than in the imaginary creatures of her fancy, or of the stage on which she had seen them represented. She could not understand either why the one should leave her for new friends, or the other's brow

should be darkened by some sudden and unexplained cloud.

CHAPTER X.

A VISIT FROM MR. EVERTON.

PEGGY and May sat down to their tea-dinner alone. The old woman was even more loquacious and May even more silent than usual. The one talked over all the sermons, hymns, and company she had heard and seen, the latter thought of Mr. Everton.

"What should we be doing without tea? It is such a comfort when one is coming home late like this morning," sighed Peggy, pouring out a fifth or sixth cup. "Take you another cup, child. You will be wanting it against the evening. Grandfather is saying that you may come to the meeting with me."

May's face brightened up, and she said—

"Then I shall see Mr. Everton again, and speak to him, great-grandmother."

"And he a clergyman from London to be thinking of a little girl like you!" retorted Peggy. "He will be making speeches at the dinner, and preaching this evening, I'll warrant me. There's beautiful the vicar did preach! And I heard your voice quite plain in the hymns, child. I must say the ladies aren't teaching you for nothing."

"I wonder if Mr. Everton heard it," sighed May.

When Peggy's tongue was once set going, and there was no Evan to superintend its machinery, it never stopped; so May had nothing to do but to listen, which she always did most conscientiously. But on the present occasion her sensitive face had an abstracted look

unnatural to it; and it was evident to her grandmother that she did not take in half of her discourse.

"Your wits have gone wool-gathering and your eyes are looking after them, child," she said, laughing heartily. "I suppose you've had enough preaching and praying and singing, without my talk a-top of it all."

"Yes, great-grandmother. And I am thinking of Mr. Everton, who was so kind, and Cousin Meredith, who was so cross. Why wouldn't he come in?"

"No good to think of the tempers of the men, child. They are just like the weather, sour to-day, sweet to-morrow. But *hach y fi,* how hot it is!"

Just as Peggy ejaculated this too evident truth, Dai Bach, or little Davy, as he was called, came in. He was the small collier member of the choir already mentioned. He was breathless with the heat and the exertion of walking, but managed to say that there was a gentleman coming, whom he had brought to the cottage at Miss Edith's request. May was off her seat and out of the house in a moment, exclaiming, "It is Mr. Everton! He has come to see me!" and she soon returned, leading in that gentleman.

"Stop you, Dai Bach, and have a cup of tea," said Peggy, as the boy was about to depart, and he sat down nothing loth, while Mr. Everton greeted Peggy.

It was a proud moment for May, who had to act as interpreter between her grandmother and friend. But Peggy was vain of the little English she knew, and occasionally put in a sentence.

"Might I ask for a cup of tea?" said Mr. Everton, when seated.

"Yes, seure, sir, an wir," replied Peggy, with side nods and winks at May.

And May brought clean teacups and plates and the tea-caddy, from which Peggy abstracted more tea, and some special seed cake, kept for guests, and the loaf-sugar basin. Although Mr Everton had but lately partaken of a sumptuous luncheon, he was too polite and well pleased

to stay these proceedings, and entertained himself by talking to Dai Bach till all was ready.

"Please may I pour out Mr. Everton's tea, great-grandmother?" asked May, in Welsh.

"There's pert, she is!" cried Peggy, nodding to Mr. Everton, and letting May have her desire.

That tea-table was a suggestive picture. The jolly old farm-wife, the hard-worked London curate, the half-crippled, stunted little collier, and the child of many gifts and graces. Mr. Everton explained that as he understood the afternoon prayer-meeting was to be conducted in Welsh, he had asked Miss Edith for a guide to Derwen Fach, instead of joining in it; but he hoped to attend the evening services. Mr. Richards had kindly offered him a bed, which would enable him to see more of May and the beautiful neighbourhood that surrounded her. Although he had not chosen South Wales as the scene of his little tour on purpose to see the child, she had, to a certain extent, influenced his movements; and now all that he saw interested him so deeply that he wished, if possible, to prolong his stay.

"I hear little May is turning out quite a singer, Mrs. Morrison," he said to Peggy.

May was too shy to interpret this, so Dai Bach had to come to her aid. It evolved amongst them that May was only one of many singers, but that the ladies had taken a fancy to her voice, and thought more of it than Evan considered good. Indeed they, particularly Miss Edith, taught her many things, because she was, as yet, too delicate to go daily to the National School at Derwen. Mr. Everton asked her to read to him, which she did both in Welsh and English, and when the teapot was finally drained he said he should like to hear her sing.

"May Dai Bach sing too? He sings better than me," she said, and the large dark eyes of Davy glistened.

Immediately the kitchen resounded with the songs and hymns, and even Handelian performances of the children, and Mr. Everton listened astonished. Ever and anon

Peggy's quavers and trills joined in, while the clock ticked louder and louder, and its patron moon listened composedly.

"She picks up everything she hears, and can even play the harmonium," said old Peggy.

"There can be no doubt as to the sweetness of her voice," thought Mr. Everton, but did not express his thought.

He had been there about an hour, when May looked at her grandmother and pointed to the clock.

"On my deed, I was forgetting! It is time to be going," said Peggy. "Tell you the gentleman, child."

May whispered to Mr. Everton that they were going to the evening services, and he proposed that they should all walk together. Accordingly, when all were ready, they set out. May looked in dismay at the unwashed tea-things, but her grandmother said they could wait for once, and, pulling the door to after her, followed her youngers down the garden steps. She put such faith in her neighbours that she did not lock the door; indeed, it was not necessary, for as yet robbers and murderers had not penetrated to her remote dwelling.

"Go you on before, and I'll take my time with Dai Bach," cried Peggy, as May looked back, inquiringly.

Accordingly, she had the happiness of tripping on hand in hand with Mr. Everton, while her grandmother waddled and puffed behind.

"I haven't been to church or meeting before without being arm in arm with Evan for over fifty years," the latter remarked to Dai Bach.

"What a long time! Don't your arms ache?" returned Dai, looking at her with astonished eyes.

By degrees Mr. Everton drew from May all her little story, from the day of their parting until that of their meeting again. He was compelled to question her much, as she was uncommunicative by nature, but before they reached their destination he had heard the details of her journey, arrival at Derwen Fach, and her performances

and adventures with her new friends. Miss Edith, by whose side he had sat at luncheon, had given him a slight sketch of her illness and its ostensible cause, and thus he was enabled to probe her in the right direction. He gave her good advice concerning her conduct to her grandparents, giving her to understand that they were now her natural protectors, as he had not succeeded in tracing her father.

"If you please, how is Mrs. Pope?" asked May.

"She has left the house where you lodged with her, and I have quite lost sight of her."

May's countenance fell. She sometimes thought she should like to go back again to Mrs. Pope and smoky London.

The big room was nearly full when they reached it, and Peggy was much alarmed, for she knew that she should be lectured by Evan for being late. She had, however, the satisfaction of securing a seat near the door, for what with the unaided walk and previous untold cups of tea, she was quite exhausted. Indeed, the evening was unusually sultry. To May's gratification and relief, Mr. Everton threaded the crowd with her and Dai Bach, and even ascended the platform with them at a nod from Mr. Davies, the vicar. She took refuge with Miss Edith in the choir at the back, while he joined his clerical brethren in front.

"Isn't he kind? Don't you like him, Miss Edith?" whispered May; but Miss Edith only shook her head, which May interpreted into a negative rather than a command for silence.

The evening services were little more than a repetition of the morning, only they were longer, and there was more singing. The crowd was even denser both within and without the building, and those who could not find room inside were still able to join in the chorus of praise, though out in the open air. It was a sweet and serious scene, where all was in harmony. The varied hues of the sky seemed to respond to the lights and shades of the

music; and as the sun slowly disappeared behind the western hill, heaven and earth remained aglow with the radiance he left behind him. It might almost have been said, "There shall be no night there," for hills, woods, meads, and streams were flushed with rosy light; while the prayer-consecrated edifice itself and the faces of the worshippers were reddened by the soft effulgence.

Even May's pale countenance was kindled into colour by the radiant flood that poured through the open windows, and as she stood to praise, knelt to pray, or sat to listen, the expressive features, with their curious golden aureole, looked strangely pathetic when brought into comparison with the ruddier and more bronzed faces that surrounded her. It was with difficulty Miss Edith could restrain her, when Mr. Everton rose, at the urgent request of the vicar, to say a few words to the strangers whom he saw for the first time. Indeed, Edith was not herself indifferent to this address of a friend who had first interested her by letter, and then in his own person.

But they need have been under no apprehension. Short and simple were the words he spoke. He congratulated his hearers on the possession of a retreat so calm, peaceful, and beautiful; and contrasted it with similar excellent institutions in the noise and bustle of the great cities. He gave them a sketch of the young men's and young women's Christian institutes in London, and hoped the one that day opened in the heart of the country would prove as great a boon as did those. Pointing to the roseate hills, and calling attention to the sleepy lullaby of the bird-choirs, he concluded by saying they resembled the peace of God and the whispers of His Holy Spirit in the human heart. As he ended, the red flush suddenly faded from the mountains, and revealed the soft blue-grey summer twilight that lay beneath.

May's eyes were filled with tears, she knew not why, and when she glanced up at Edith to see how she had liked the address, she perceived that hers were moist.

Both were pleased when the vicar, so eloquent in Welsh, translated the short sermon into that language for the benefit of the natives, and concluded by an earnest entreaty that all present would make of that building not only a place of amusement, but a house "Holy to the Lord."

The moon had risen and was high up in heaven's arch, the birds had sung themselves to sleep, and cool night was lazily stealing upon sultry day before the services were ended. Other light was not needed, for the preaching was extempore, the psalms and hymns written on the memory. At the conclusion of all, the choir rose and sang "The Hallelujah Chorus." Mr. Everton was not the only one present astonished at this performance. Turning to listen and see better, his glance fell on Edith and May, and not unnaturally remained fixed on their fair faces. May, when she sang, was like a child inspired, and her clear soprano was distinctly audible, and Edith's dark eyes shone in the moonlight. Neither music nor faces were likely to be forgotten, and Mr. Everton sighed as he thought of the morrow, on which he must bid them and the beautiful neighbourhood of Derwen farewell, maybe for ever.

In spite of the lateness of the hour the people yet lingered in and about the building, but Evan hurried May off without a word of farewell to Mr. Everton. She struggled bravely to restrain her tears, and succeeded. When they reached home her grandfather ordered her to bed at once, while he gave Peggy a slight lecture for the uncleared tea-table, which he helped her to set straight. Terpsichore was still May's comfort and confidante, so she consoled herself by taking her to bed with her, and while whispering her distress at not wishing her friend good-bye, she fell asleep.

But the following afternoon Mr. Everton re-appeared. He had accepted an invitation from the Vicar of Derwen to sleep at the vicarage that night, and he asked if May might conduct him thither. Permission was granted on

condition that she should return with her Cousin Meredith, who had gone to Derwen on business for Mr. Richards. Happy May set out accordingly, and, strange to say, she and Mr. Everton having exhausted other subjects the previous evening, talked of nothing but Miss Edith for the best part of three miles.

Her conversation with her cousin on her way home was very different. She was his confidante, and she had to listen to amazing schemes, which he, in his ambition, had been fostering. He had at last obtained a hearing from Mr. Richards, who had promised to give him opportunities for improvement, and had consented to examine with him the disused mine, concerning which he had said much more to May than she could understand. But when he hinted at the possibility of his leaving Derwen, the child burst into tears, with the words, "Then—then—I shall lose them both, Mr. Everton and Cousin Meredith!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAIRY PRINCE.

It was not in vain that Meredith had succeeded in attracting Mr. Richards's notice, and May's worst fears were verified. Meredith had not read every book he could lay hold of for nothing, and even the insatiable curiosity of which his grandfather complained had been turned to good account by his observant mind. When he fancied he saw a matter clearly, he could not rest until he made it known to others, and when he believed that he had discovered that the pit already alluded to as shut up had been closed unadvisedly, he spoke to Mr. Richards about it on the first opportunity. For some time that gentleman treated him as a young upstart, and bade him

mind his work; but he was not to be daunted, and finally succeeded in waylaying him at the mouth of the said pit. Mr. Richards, preoccupied as usual, would have passed him by with an inquiry as to what he was doing there, had not Meredith boldly arrested him by saying that he was looking after a buried treasure.

"If you will come with me, sir, I will show you where the seam of coal runs, and where to sink a new shaft," he said.

Mr. Richards, struck by his persistence, turned, and went with him.

"Father has always said the same, sir, only he hasn't the courage of a mouse," said Meredith, as he led his master to certain spots, where, to his half-tutored understanding, there were unmistakable signs that the coal lay underneath, but that the mine had been worked in a wrong direction.

Mr. Richards was struck with the youth's discernment and sagacity, and began to perceive, what his daughters had often told him, that Meredith wanted only the opportunity to become a man of parts. He had gained much geological knowledge, as Hugh Miller did before him, by such means as lay within his reach, and he was panting for the opportunity of enlarging his sphere.

"I must see about this. Thank you for your interest in my affairs," said Mr. Richards, who was a man of few words. "Better say nothing about it to anyone but me, or, perhaps, your father."

Thus it came about that Mr. Richards set to work quietly and secretly to investigate the matter, and the result of his investigations was so satisfactory that he conceived a high opinion of Meredith's talents. This resulted in his asking him if he would like "to improve himself," as the phrase goes. Meredith replied that that was just what he wanted. Mr. Richards then proposed that he should go into another county where he had shares in more important mines than those of Derwen, and where he should be clerk under a resident engineer,

who was also manager. This agreed with all Meredith's preconceived ideas, and far surpassed his hopes.

"Then, in course of time, if your discoveries here turn out genuine, you may, perhaps, come back again," said Mr. Richards.

But Meredith only thought of seeing more of the world and not being shut out of God's beautiful works by coal-pit toil. He should at least live above ground, even though he must descend into the bowels of the earth to learn or to superintend.

Mr. Richards scarcely gave him time to consult his father or to listen to the lamentations of his mother. The whole affair was arranged so rapidly that his friends hardly realised it before he was gone, which was only a week or so after Mr. Everton's visit. He had only time to kiss May's tearful face and bid her write to him, only time to receive Evan's blessing and Peggy's counsel to see that his linen was well aired, before he started for his new life. The secretaryship of the institute, the Sunday-school class, the choir—all had to be abandoned at a touch of Mr. Richards's master-hand, and it was four years before he returned to see how his place had been filled and who had done his work. Four years! during which May grew to be twelve years old and his sister Rachel nearly twenty.

The May of twelve was not so very different from the May of eight. She had grown, it is true; but she was still small, fragile, and childlike. But, in spite of this, she was singularly helpful. Indeed, old Peggy sang her praises so loudly that Rachel's jealousy increased, and Leah was heard to declare that "she was sick of that child's name." Fortunately, however, she did not see much of these affectionate cousins; for Leah had now a husband and a couple of children to look after, and Rachel had more than she could do to attend to her sickly mother and smarten herself up now and again to receive the visits of a young farmer who had taken a fancy to her good looks. Indeed, but for this silly jealousy of May, she was a nice girl

enough: and when May and she were actually together she would ask herself how she could care whether such a bit of a creature were admired and praised or not.

One afternoon in April she had come over to see her grandparents, and found May seated on the settle by

May seated on the settle reciting to Evan.

Evan's side, reciting to him. Evan was not well. The four years that had only served to add to the growth and strength of the young people had tended to bend his strong back and erect head downwards, and to weaken his heretofore robust frame. Peggy, too, would say that she

"was not so young as she was when Meredith went away," and would wonder when he meant to come back. Time was now reckoned from the day and year on which the grandson she loved best had left his native place.

"What! reading, May! I thought you were always at work at this time of day," said Rachel. "Father wants you to come over and play for our practice to-night."

"May I, great-grandfather?" asked May, looking up wistfully at Evan.

"Why will you say 'great-grandfather,' May? One would think he was a giant," said Rachel.

"Because I like it, and don't choose that she shall be laughed out of it," said Evan. "Have you had news of Meredith? He doesn't write as often as he ought; though I must say his last letter to the child was wonderful well-spelt, written, and expressed."

"I think May gets all the letters and all the teaching," returned Rachel. "As to Meredith, he'll be too grand for any of us."

"I think he will be just the same, only bigger and cleverer," pleaded May.

As she spoke there appeared a figure striding up the garden steps, and taking two at a time.

"What gentleman can this be?" asked Rachel, glancing at herself in a small looking-glass that hung behind her. "Is it your friend the London parson, May?"

The child started, looked up, and shook her head.

In another moment a good-looking, well-dressed young man stood in the middle of the kitchen.

"Don't you know me?" he inquired, with a merry laugh, taking off his hat which slouched over his face.

"The fairy prince! the fairy prince!" cried May, slipping off the settle and gliding timidly towards him.

"Meredith! Is it you? There's grand you are!" exclaimed the others, and immediately the recognition was followed by embraces.

"What gentleman can this be?"

"I knew you would come back so," whispered May, who had not even yet quite forgotten her early days.

Her hand slipped into his, as of old, and when, at last, they were all seated, she found herself on the settle, between him and her grandfather.

"I just looked in here on my way home," said Meredith, answering many questions as they were put to him. "I could not come back before, because I have had no time for a holiday. I have been sent here, there, and everywhere for my employers."

"Then you have had just what you wanted," broke in Evan. "They tell me that roving's the way of the world nowadays. I, who have been all my life in one place, have seen a deal more than was good for me."

"But those who stick in one place don't get on in the world," replied Meredith.

"So much the better, perhaps. And what have you done?"

"I have got on fairly, grandfather. I have already a hundred a year. But I musn't stop to talk to-day, or father and mother will be annoyed. Will you all come home with me, and then one talk will serve every purpose? I haven't many days to spare."

"Bless me! One would think you was Lord Mayor," ejaculated Peggy, laughing till she cried. "Why you are grander and more in a hurry than May's friend, Mr. Everton, was; and he all the way from London!"

"He has been here again, hasn't he?" asked Meredith.

"Yes, last summer," answered Rachel. "They say he came after Miss Edith, but got no encouragement because he's got no money. He stopped a couple of nights at the vicarage, and came to call on Mrs. Richards, who was at home. He and Mr. Davies, vicar, dined at Derwen Fawr; and that was all."

"And he came here," said May.

"And I suppose you and Miss Edith are fonder of him than ever," said Meredith, whose handsome features had seemed very expressive while Rachel spoke.

"Yes," replied May, with her wise little nod.

After a few *pros* and *cons*, the whole party started for Tygwyn. Meredith was much grieved to see that his grandfather rose from his seat with difficulty, and that he stooped perceptibly. He did not venture to remark upon it, knowing Evan's character; but he asked May, aside, how long he had been so bad.

"Since the flood, when he went out in the night to save the cows. Jenny was drowned," returned May, with a shudder that seemed to run through her small frame.

Meredith had heard of this, but in the bustle of his new life had forgotten it for the moment. He now realised how unequal his grandparents and May must be for the daily farm-work. Still, they all looked bright and happy. He realised it yet more when he watched them descend the garden path and final steps to the wicket. May also watched them with a keen anxiety, for she was always in dread of their falling, and moved slowly, either in front of them or at their sides, until they were safe in the lane. Then she placed herself at her grandfather's right side, and he laid one heavy hand on her shoulder, thus supporting himself, while in the other he grasped a stick. Peggy still put her arm through his, but found no support in it.

"Please to let me help you, grandfather," cried Meredith.

"Thank you, my boy, but I like the child best. She is just the height."

"You will not refuse, grandmother?" added Meredith, offering his arm, which Peggy took.

And so they proceeded, very slowly, to Meredith's home.

His reception by his mother may be imagined. She was alone, and seated, as usual, in her beehive chair. Although she had a stocking in her hands, she was literally knitting it in her sleep, for she had fallen into a doze. 'Lizbeth was always knitting, and could knit almost as

well with her eyes shut as open. Meredith crept round to her, and, kneeling by her side, looked tenderly on her poor, pale face, irritable even in repose. He fancied that she was either talking to herself or dreaming, for he certainly heard her murmur his name.

"Mother!" he ejaculated, and that sweet word roused her.

The stocking fell from her hands, her arms were around his neck, her lips were on his cheek. "Meredith, my boy!" she cried, and mother and son were moved to tears.

So was May, who stole behind the beehive chair, and smothered a rising sob. Then she slipped out, unperceived by anyone, and ran up the ravine, past several cottages, until she reached the pit. Here Uncle Laban was superintending the loading of many wagons, carts, and donkey-backs with part of the coal that lay heaped up round about the pit.

"Here's Merch, Derwen Fach. Look you, how she's running. See you, how pretty she is," said the owners of the carts.

"What can be the matter? Father or mother must have a fit!" exclaimed Uncle Laban.

"Cousin Meredith!" was all the breathless little girl could say for a few moments.

"Well! what of him? What's the matter?"

"Nothing, Uncle Laban. He's come home; he's come home," replied May, venturing almost to the pit's mouth, down which she could never look without a shudder. A great coal-basket was just coming to the surface, and May started back, and so, as of old, off fell the hat.

Many were the exclamations at sight of the golden meshes, and she shrank back abashed. But she was soon surrounded by several old women whom she knew, and who began to question her concerning Meredith. She responded to their queries by monosyllables, nods, and shakes of the head, which caused them to say, when her back was turned, "There's small and delicate that grand-

child Evan Derwen Fach do look. I am wondering if she is right in her head. I am thinking that she can't be, with that curious tangled hair, and that she lost her wits in the fever."

"Stop you a minute, May, fach," said Laban. "I must enter these loads, and then I'll come."

But before they left the pit Meredith had arrived in search of May. Knowing her sensitive nature, he always feared the effect of excitement. No sooner had he seen that she was safe and greeted his father, than he found himself in the midst of many old friends, some of whom were colliers, others farm labourers, or the farmers themselves, or the women who came for coal to sell again, to most of whom he had done many good turns. He stood, with May's hand in his, to receive the congratulations of his friends on his improved appearance and circumstances, while his father completed his work of weighing and account taking.

"There's the good of having brains; he was always a fine young man, but now he's quite the gentleman," was what May heard said at her back, and she felt more and more convinced that Meredith was, in very deed, a "Fairy Prince."

CHAPTER XII.

EASTER MONDAY.

Even sickly, peevish 'Lizbeth was happy that afternoon, and a merry party shared her tea and cakes. The news of Meredith's return spread so rapidly that Leah had come home with one child at her side and another in her arms, and Rachel had as much as she could do to pour out the tea. Before it was over Cousin George, the successful and smart young doctor, looked in, and he was followed by

Leah's husband and Rachel's lover, so that Meredith was overpowered by questions and congratulations. As to May, she could neither eat nor drink for thinking of him, and wondering how four years could have altered him so much. Her stock of fairy lore had taught her that it usually took a longer time for the poor captive to be transformed into the beautiful prince.

"The world has turned topsy-turvy since I was young," ejaculated Evan, looking round on his descendants. "I suppose it's the railroads."

"Science generally," responded Meredith, magnificently which caused the men to wink at one another, amused, and the women to look admiringly at the speaker. "How does the Derwen Institute prosper?" he continued.

"It does fairly well without science, and even without you, my son," replied Laban. "But I've been obliged to fill your place, and become man-of-all-work."

"As if he hadn't enough to do before!" put in 'Lizbeth, peevishly. "Since you went away, Meredith, there's nobody to help father, and now here's Rachel thinking of getting married; as if Leah wasn't enough for one family."

"I can help you, Aunt 'Lizbeth," whispered May, creeping up to the beehive chair.

"Ah, Merch fach, you'll have enough to do with the old people," answered 'Lizbeth, passing her fingers through May's hair.

"I'm due at the Institute before eight," said Laban. "For a wonder the young ladies are all away at Miss Howel's, Pen Pont's, wedding, so there's no one but May to play for the singing class. You'll have enough to do, Meredith, to talk to your friends and see what we've done. Just try over that part song, child."

Shy little May rose, with a deprecatory glance at Meredith, and went to the harmonium, which, it will be remembered, stood beneath the coloured print representing the reconciliation of Joseph and his brethren.

Miss Richards, having discovered that May had a genius for music, had prevailed on Evan, much against his will,

to allow her to teach the child the harmonium, and her aptitude was such that she seemed to learn intuitively. She had practised as she could; sometimes at the Institute, sometimes at Uncle Laban's, and as Meredith stood behind his little friend he was as much surprised at the progress of his fairy queen as she of her fairy prince. He wondered how her small fingers could press down the keys, or her feet reach and work the bellows. Yet she managed to do both with comparative ease, and played a correct accompaniment to the Welsh part-song; while Uncle Laban acted as leader, and the other members of the family party joined in the singing. As to old Peggy, she was quite inspired, and her runs and quavers were delightful, while even 'Lizbeth, knitting in her beehive chair, occasionally joined in. Meredith's hand was brushed more than once across his eyes, and his voice faltered; at which May's golden locks moved, and the pale little face turned towards him.

"We are practising for Easter Monday, you know, Meredith. The schools are to come to Derwen this year," said Rachel.

This family practice continued until it was time to adjourn to the Institute. May's small hands were not a whit tired, and she was quite ready to resume her accompaniments when they all arrived at "the big room." Meredith looked about him with mingled feelings. Here were tables covered with magazines and papers, at which already miners were sitting, deep in innocent study and amusement; there was the harmonium prepared for the practice; and there again bagatelle, chess, and draught boards. But what was new to him was a small inner room, arranged as a coffee stall, where Mrs. Richards's white-aproned maid, Susan, presided in the absence of her mistresses. He could not help a pang of regret that all this should have been accomplished without him, and began to learn the difficult lesson that he was only one of the multitude after all. But what astonished him most was to watch May helping his father to arrange

certain matters that belonged to his province of secretary, and finally seating herself at the harmonium. Little Davy was at her side, and they were soon surrounded by many members of Miss Richards's choir, who were practising certain appointed pieces for the meeting of the Sunday-schools at Derwen the following Monday.

"Will you play instead of me, Cousin Meredith?" asked May. "I only try sometimes when Miss Richards is busy."

"I could not, May; I haven't practised lately. But we have a splendid choir and band connected with our mines, and have gained many prizes at the Eisteddfod."

"Better than ours?" questioned May, disappointed.

"Well, I would not say that," he replied.

"You will come with us on Monday, cousin?"

"If I am allowed to stay so long."

May sighed. She sadly wanted Cousin Meredith back again, and the last four years had seemed lonely without him, who had always been so kind to her. But he was permitted to remain over Easter Monday, which was a general holiday.

Long before the mania for music spread in England, the Welsh cultivated the divine art amid their hills and dales. The Eisteddfod and Easter Monday meetings of choirs and other friendly unions tended to improve the taste and foster the love of the people for the "heavenly maid." Amateur choirs, as now common amongst us English, were not yet the fashion, when the Welsh were already united in vocal harmony. The earnest practice in the home and church had been going on for generations, and that of Miss Richards's choir, as it was called, was nothing more than a modern development of ancient custom.

Easter was early that year, and on the long-expected Monday the weather was fine. A goodly number of men, women, and children left Derwen Fawr, where they all assembled, for the village of Derwen on that happy day. May had the satisfaction of being once more hand in

hand with Meredith, for Evan and Peggy, together with Mrs. Richards and one or two feeble friends, had the honour of driving in Mr. Richards's wagonnette. The pedestrians formed a sort of procession, and very picturesque it was as it wound through the fields and woods. The scarlet cloaks contrasted prettily with the delicate green of grass and leaf, and the spontaneous songs and hymns that burst from one and another of the people also contrasted and blended with the glad music of the birds, so long silenced by the chill of winter.

"Look at the primroses, Cousin Meredith!" exclaimed May. "I wish the children of the pantomimes had some. I never saw a primrose till I came here."

"You don't forget it all, then, though you are so silent," returned Meredith, and May shook her head. "Tell me what Mr. Everton did when he was here, and if it is true about him and Miss Edith."

May suddenly remembered that once before, during a similar walk, she had talked of nothing but Miss Edith, and wondered if Cousin Meredith were also going to give her up for that kind friend.

"I think it was quite true," she replied, in a somewhat melancholy voice. "But I don't understand. Mr. Everton was so kind to me, and gave me a book and some music; but he seemed very sad, and went away without wishing me good-bye."

"Did he wish Miss Edith good-bye?"

May shook her head, but could not be prevailed upon to speak of Miss Edith.

"Have you heard from him since?" asked Meredith.

"Oh yes, ever so often," was the reply.

"And does Miss Edith see the letters, and does he send her messages?"

May nodded, but was silent. Then she said—

"I hope you will not get to be a grand, rich man, like Mr. Richards, cousin. I like great-grandfather and Uncle Laban best. I wonder if my father is rich or poor, and where he is now, while I am so happy with you."

"Do you remember him?" asked Meredith, interested.

"A little. He used to nurse me and draw me funny pictures. I am sure he loved mamma very dearly." The soft voice sank to a whisper, and the head drooped.

When they reached the church there was already a considerable crowd round about it. Clergymen were mustering their schools, and masters arranging their pupils. They had come from far and near to take part in the day's proceedings, for it was customary thus to meet at different churches in various parishes every Easter Monday, for catechising, repetition, and singing. The Misses Richards and Uncle Laban marshalled their school into the part of the church appointed for them, while other schools filled other portions of the sacred edifice, that of Derwen itself being amalgamated with Derwen Fawr, which was an offshoot from the parent tree. There was a considerable congregation besides, and the large church was full.

The morning service was first read by a neighbouring clergyman, after which the catechising began. May looked and listened with breathless attention. She knew that it was the etiquette for no clergyman to question his own flock, and she saw Mr. Davies, her own special vicar, in the reading desk, surrounded by a strange school. One long chapter had been chosen for all, and as school succeeded school, they acquitted themselves more or less well. When it was the turn of Derwen Fawr, May's heart beat quick, and she felt when standing by the side of Little Davy, beneath that reading desk, first repeating verse after verse, then questioned by one whom she had never before seen, as if she should have no answers to give. But when her turn came, she was quite ready, and her clear voice was so audible that the catechising clergyman looked over his desk to see whence it came. This greatly embarrassed her, and but for Little Davy, who was as ready as she, her courage would have failed.

"Very well indeed. Very good. Quite right," accom-

panied the answers of the small couple, and everyone strained their necks to see them.

Then came the school choirs. They also performed, by turns, psalms and hymns chosen for the occasion, and it was curious to note the excitement and movements of the leaders, who seemed as if they would force out the sound by dint of their conducting bâtons. And Uncle Laban did not come behind any of them in this matter. Miss Richards had selected him as leader, and he worked with a will.

As to May, she got so excited in watching him sway to and fro, wave his wand, stamp his foot, and otherwise demean himself as if he were slightly crazed, that she sang even more and more energetically, till her voice, naturally penetrating, surmounted all the other voices. When Uncle Laban gave her an approving nod, she exerted herself more and more. She was well supported by Little David and the rest, so that when Uncle Laban's stick gradually ceased its cabalistic motions, and the voices died away with it, there was little doubt but that the Derwen Fawr choir and school had acquitted themselves the best.

When they were returning to their seats, all the congregation looking after them, May, who began to feel much abashed and sure that she had sung too loud, felt a hand laid on her shoulder. It was Meredith's, who, being no longer a member of the choir, was in a separate pew. He had kept a little corner for her, into which she thankfully slipped, much to Little Davy's discomfiture.

"Is it right?" she murmured, for this was the first time she had made one of the Easter Monday singers.

"Quite, for you have finished," he replied, and she hid her flushed cheeks and excited eyes between him and the corner of the pew.

Hour after hour this choiring continued, varied by the repetition of long and difficult chapters of the Bible by individuals, who stood up in good faith to show what pains they took to learn God's Holy Word. Some of

these were aged men and women. It was altogether an impressive service, and the whole was not over until the afternoon. It was, indeed, nearly five o'clock when all the schools marched in procession to the large and handsome school-house to partake of tea and buns.

May was an object of general attention, and many were the inquiries made concerning her.

"Such a voice ought to be cultivated," remarked more than one person in her hearing, which caused her so much alarm that she found it difficult to eat her buns, albeit she was very hungry.

"You must go back in the wagonnette," whispered Miss Edith at her back. "You look very tired, and it is a long walk."

"Let Little Davy go, instead, Miss Edith," pleaded May. "He told me that he was in the pit half the night, and he can hardly stand."

"There is room for you both, but you must come at once," said Edith.

May obeyed, regretfully, for she had hoped for another walk with her cousin, and she and Little Davy were soon on their way homewards together, with a carriage full of the aged or infirm.

Meredith, meanwhile, was addressed by one after the other of the Misses Richards, who had not seen him since his return, and he could not help remarking that Edith did not look quite so cheerful as when he left home four years ago. The vicar, also, had a few words to say to him, and introduced him to one or two of his friends as an old parishioner who was making a start in life elsewhere.

"Don't crow too early because it's fine weather, my boy," said his father, as they walked home together. "I tremble for you because you have made too quick a start. Go softly, go surely. I almost wish you had never left us, and were still working on here."

"Oh, father, don't say that!" exclaimed Meredith. "If you bound my body in the coal-pit, you could not fetter my soul."

"So be it, my son; but I know not what thy mother will say when she knows for certain that thou must leave us to-morrow."

"I will come again soon, dear father—very soon."

"Say, 'God willing,' lad. Ours are the plans, God's the fulfilment."

And there was silence between father and son.

CHAPTER XIII.

MAY'S FUTURE.

"WHAT a grand young man your Cousin Meredith has become," said Miss Edith to May a few days after he had once more left his home.

"Yes," replied May, meditatively; "but I think I loved him best as he was before, though his face and hands are white as a gentleman's, and he looks and speaks so fine."

"My father says he will make his employer's fortune first and his own afterwards," remarked Edith.

"Then he will be too grand and great for me," said May, sorrowfully. "I think I like people not to change at all. We are all the same here, except Cousin Meredith, for one, two, three, four, five, six years," she added, telling off the numbers on her fingers. "And Mr. Everton is the same in London." She put her hand into her pocket and drew forth a letter. "See how kind he is, Miss Edith! It came yesterday, and great-grandfather says he must be a very good man to remember a little girl like me."

As Edith took the letter her face flushed and her hand trembled. It was, indeed, a kind letter, and contained at its conclusion a message of remembrance for all May's good friends at Derwen Fawr. But Edith read and

returned it without comment, which disappointed May, and she looked at her almost reproachfully.

"Don't you like Mr. Everton, Miss Edith?" she asked.

"Yes, very much. Now let us go on with the lesson," replied Edith, her face red, her manner sad.

They were seated at the harmonium in the dining-room of Derwen Fawr. Miss Richards was engaged, and Edith had taken her place as instructor.

"I think you may teach me now, May," she said, as the child played, almost artistically, a difficult passage. "Would you like to study music as a profession?"

May scarcely understood the question, but after a pause and meditative droop of the head, she mastered its meaning.

"I would rather stay with great-grandfather and grandmother, please, Miss Edith. They couldn't do without me. They say so, please; and, indeed, I don't think they could, now that Cousin Meredith is gone, and Cousin Leah married, and Cousin Rachel going to be married. I hope you won't be married, Miss Edith. What should we do without you?"

"You need have no fear on that head, May," said Edith, so decidedly, that May's anxious face brightened. When she returned home she told Evan what had passed. She concealed nothing from her grandparents, and by her conscientious repetition of the few events of her life that chanced outside the little farm tended to amuse them in their old age.

"Thou art right, child. We could not do without thee," said Evan. "I wish I hadn't burnt thy pretty crown."

"I don't mind, dear grandfather. I can make sweeter wreaths of real living flowers than that was, which was only make-believe."

"And thy poor doll, child. But I didn't understand thee then as I do now. Is she still alive? I think I should like to see her again."

"Oh, great-grandfather! She is quite well, and she has grown into a Welshwoman like me."

May ran into the inner room, and returned with Terpsichore. That damsel of "the light fantastic toe" was strangely metamorphosed, and when May placed her demurely on Evan's knee, he exclaimed, laughing—

"Why, I shouldn't have known her!"

"That's what I thought!" returned May, clapping her hands. "I made all the dress myself, except the hat, which Miss Edith gave me; and don't you think she is the image of grandmother?"

Evan laughed so heartily that the unusual sound brought in old Peggy. He held up the doll.

"Thy likeness, old woman. 'Tisn't everyone that sits for her picture as can say, 'It's my double!' What's her name, child? Hast called her Peggy, too?"

"I haven't changed her name, great-grandfather, but I will if you wish it."

At this the old couple joined in a laugh so hearty that Evan declared his poor rheumatic back was breaking, while Peggy held her sides for fear of consequences. May laughed, too, for company, although, being herself quite in earnest, she did not see the joke.

But a good joke it undoubtedly was. There was that graceful and lightly-attired muse, Terpsichore, transformed, by dint of striped woollen petticoat, scarlet cloak, linsey apron, knitted worsted stockings, tall hat, and full cap, into a comely Welshwoman, and her round cheeks, high colour, and dark hair and eyes were by no means bad types, even if lacking expression, of the class.

"She even knitted the stockings," remarked Peggy, who had been in the secret.

"You do not dislike her now, great-grandfather, any more than me?" said May.

"I never disliked either of ye, child. 'Twas all a mistake," replied Evan.

"Then can she live in the kitchen?" asked delighted May.

"Let her live where she will. But thou art getting too old for dolls, child," answered Evan.

"Yes, great-grandfather; but this one is different," said May, humbly, and henceforth Terpsichore had the place of honour.

In spite of this, however, Evan's prejudices were not dispersed. Some days after Mrs. and Miss Richards called, and found Evan alone. They had come to speak to him about May and her musical talent. Her voice had attracted so much attention on Easter Monday that everyone was talking of it, and they began to think that it should be turned to account.

"Could she not have regular lessons from some skilled teacher, if a collection were made to pay for them?" asked Mrs. Richards. "She might then, perhaps, go to London."

"No, ma'am, she cannot," replied Evan, decidedly. "So long as we live we want her, and she is best here. When we are gone—well—'the Lord will provide.' Besides, we have not been beholden to charity yet, and we will keep independent as long as we may."

"It would not be charity, Evan," returned Mrs. Richards, who disliked to have her benevolent intentions disregarded. "'Helpful and helping one another' is a good text. Besides, you must think of her future."

"She won't be forsaken so long as Laban and Meredith and the rest of 'em live. 'Tis enough to lose the flower of one's flock in explosions and overflowings of mines, to say nothing of the child's mother in London, and some in foreign parts, but I won't part with this ewe lamb."

"She is so useful in the choir and the Institute, and might even be taught to play the organ at church," put in Miss Richards.

"That is another side of the question, Miss Richards. What she can do to help you who have been so good to her she shall do. But as to figuring off to London, or elsewhere, to learn to play and sing, and maybe appear before the public—that she shan't do. Just as well send her back to the play-actors. I always thought, ma'am, you were all for keeping girls at home."

"So I am, Evan," said Mrs. Richards. "But when one has a decided talent—— "

"One can use it to the glory of God, wherever placed," broke in Evan. "They are telling me that women are taking men's places nowadays, and beginning to be doctors and lecturers, and all sorts that don't become 'em! Shame for 'em! I say; shame for 'em! Better stop at home and mind their own pots and kettles than go meddling with other people's."

"I quite agree with you, Evan; but—— "

"Here's the child. Let her answer for herself," interrupted Evan, as May tripped in with a pan of well-peeled potatoes in her hand. "Wilt choose to learn to be a fine lady, and dress in all kinds of frippery, like Terp—I forget the rest of it—used to be, or be a sober country lass, and have a hat and scarlet cloak such as she and thy grandmother wear now?"

"A sober country lass, please, great-grandfather. I would like to live here always, please, Mrs. Richards, for indeed they can't do without me," replied May, understanding the gist of the question from her previous conversation with Edith, and using her grandfather's words with a sort of pleasurable pride.

"Then we will let the question rest for the present," said Mrs. Richards, touched by the tender little scene. "But you will have no objection, Evan, to her taking advantage of any lessons we can give or procure for her, provided they only tend to make her of use where she is?"

"No, ma'am, if they don't interfere with her home duties. The first commandment with promise is that which bids children honour their parents; and Peggy and I stand in the place of the child's parents. And the Apostle strengthens the command when he says that obedience to parents is well-pleasing in the sight of the Lord."

And thus May's future was settled, so far as short-sighted mortals can settle anything in this world. Doubtless her life would seem monotonous and dull to many

"Here's the child. Let her answer for herself."

young people after a brief acquaintanceship with the applause of the public, but she did not find it so. "The daily round, the common task" were happiness to her; and the voice so much admired was not lost. It cheered the hearts of her grandparents to hear it warbling with the birds in the surrounding woods from peep of day to dewy eve; and it gladdened the colliers when they came up from the mine to have its clear, sweet soprano mingling with their choir; and still more did it gladden May herself to find that it was a source of pleasure to others. Besides, her young mind expanded to receive the hope implanted in it by her friend Edith, that she might some day play the organ at church, and even receive a small salary for so doing.

"Then I can buy good things for great-grandfather, who suffers more and more," was her ecstatic exclamation.

And with this end in view she practised the harmonium every stray minute, and even received permission from her kind friend, the vicar, to try her hand on the small organ presented to the church when it was re-opened. Uncle Laban went so far as to propose that his harmonium should be transported to his father's house for her benefit; but his daughters objected, and the scheme was, at least, deferred. But as May grew older she had opportunities enough for practice. Many of the colliers besides Uncle Laban had purchased harmoniums, and she had only to appear in one of their cottages to be invited to promote the art they all loved. Indeed, nothing could go on in the musical way without her, and she might have been much from home had she so wished. But she rarely went abroad save with her grandparents, or at their desire. She was, however, a welcome guest everywhere, for the kindly and superstitious country people began to regard her almost as something ethereal. Not only did they call her "Eos Derwen," or the "Derwen Nightingale," but looked on her as a being akin to one of the fairies in whom they even yet believed. Others than Meredith would call her "The Fairy Queen;" and, as the

episode of her early life got wind, as such things will, they would even style her "The May Queen" to her face. But this distressed her, and she would tell them, gravely, that her grandfather objected to such titles, and that she was "May Derwen Fawr."

But as she grew up, her grandparents, so to express it, grew down. Evan was, properly, incapable of his farm-work, slight though it really was; and Peggy was not quite so active in her household duties as she had been. Laban was so much engaged with his ever-increasing responsibilities that he had not much time to spare, and Rachel had nearly as much as she could do at home in attending to the house and her sickly mother. Indeed, she delayed her marriage on her mother's account, though everyone told her that 'Lizbeth would sprighten up if she had nobody to work for her. And Meredith was away, gaining knowledge, and aiding Mr. Richards in many mining speculations. He wrote home as regularly as he could; but it was found that he was so acute of observation that he was sent much about, and, to the astonishment and admiration of his friends, even went abroad.

"I am fifteen to-day, great-grandfather," said May one morning at breakfast.

"God bless thee, child, and give thee many good and happy years!" returned Evan. "Thou hast too much on thy young shoulders."

"No, indeed, for grandmother will insist on doing everything."

"I'm not going to be set aside yet," cried old Peggy. "I'm worth a dozen of 'Lizbeth now. There's peevish she is!"

"Great-grandfather!" interjected May.

"Yes, child!"

"Miss Edith has offered me a birthday present of some real lessons on the organ, if you have no objection; and Mr. Davies says I may practise whenever I like. I mean when you can spare me. May I have them, great-grandfather?"

"Is it to the glory of God, child?"

May nodded.

"What do you say, Peggy?" asked Evan.

"That we'll have Mally Tybach in to help, the days she goes to learn, and that it will be grand to have an organist in our family. Who'll blow the bellows?" replied Peggy, laughing so immoderately that May looked crestfallen.

"Thou shalt have thy lessons, child, and may I be spared to hear thee play in church!" said Evan; and May put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

Another birthday present awaited her in a letter from Meredith. This contained the first post-office order she had ever received, and she did not rightly understand it. She saw the figure 5 written at the top of the order and referred to the letter to learn its meaning. She chanced to be alone when the postman brought it, so she went upstairs to examine and read it. One of the lofts had returned to its normal condition of bedroom, and she now occupied it. The furniture was scant, the place small, but it was her own, and she rejoiced in it.

Meredith's letter was short and hurried, but it was full of good wishes and loving remembrance. At its close he said that he had ventured to enclose five pounds to procure help or comforts for his grandfather and grandmother, and he left it to May to do the best she could to prevail upon them to receive it. May shook her head as she read, as much as to say, "I am afraid great-grandfather is too proud." But she was mistaken. When she put both letter and order into Evan's hand, trembling as she did so, he said—

"Thank God, for all His mercies! The boy is a good and obedient lad, after all."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EXPLOSION.

"THEY say that all the credit of the new pit is due to Meredith," remarked Evan to Laban, when he looked in on the evening of May's birthday.

"So it is in a certain way," replied Laban. "He and I talked the old one over a hundred times, but it was he who puzzled out the real facts of the case. And now it is working so well that the master's income has doubled, and the men are beginning to ask for a rise of wages."

"Not you, I hope, Laban. Let us be content with what we have. Riches mean care, and so the master will find it, and Meredith, too, I'm afraid, though I'm thankful to believe the lad's good at heart in spite of his roving mind and proud nature."

"I'm sure a little more money 'ouldn't hurt any of us," put in Peggy. "If it wasn't for Meredith's present to May I'm not knowing how we should have paid the quarter's rent this very Ladyday. And Richards, Derwen Fawr, do like his money to the minute."

"I hope it isn't so bad as that, father," said Laban. "And you never tell us, or let me help you."

"Great-grandfather was talking of selling the cow, and giving up, and going to the Union only yesterday," whispered May, with tears in her eyes.

"I'm ashamed of my want of faith, child, and grieve that thou shouldst have heard such words from my lips, the more so, as I didn't really mean them," said Evan.

"You didn't, great grandfather! Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed May, going to his side and slipping her hand in his.

"He won't go to the Union, May, so long as I have the use of my arms," laughed Laban.

"And I of mine," chuckled Peggy, setting hers akimbo.

"And I of mine," whispered May to Evan. "When I can play the organ they will be of more use than now."

"I have often rebuked other people for foolish talking, and now I am rebuked myself," said Evan, bowing his head and covering his eyes.

"I am afraid the discontent of the miners is deeper than Mr. Richards thinks," remarked Laban, to turn the conversation. "He said yesterday that he thought he would have Meredith back and set him over the works, for he knew he was faithful and 'ould do his duty. I told him that would rouse jealousy, and the men wouldn't like it. 'Then they must lump it,' said he. 'I should never have worked the pit again but for him, and now not only coal but iron has turned up.'"

"I hope they won't blacken and spoil any more of the beautiful country," suggested May.

"That they will, if there's money to be made by it. God's works fall before man's works nowadays," returned Evan.

"Perhaps if Meredith were to come back, Rachel could marry," said May, whose heart beat quick with hope.

"I fear Meredith would no longer be content with his father's house, little May: he's a gentleman now with a good salary. Six years work wonders in these go-a-head times," replied Laban, and May's countenance fell.

Yet did she understand her friend better than his nearer relatives. She had, indeed, an acute and intuitive perception of the real and the false.

What Mr. Richards had said came to pass. He summoned Meredith and set him over his former equals, over his own father, in short. He made him manager of all his works in his native valleys, and these works were continually increasing. He was to take, in short, Mr. Richards's place; for that gentleman was more and more occupied both at home and abroad. He had become not only a man of large income, but of mark; for he was chairman of many companies, and engaged in a variety of speculations. It was rumoured that he meant to build a

grand place elsewhere, and the fears of the people were great lest they should lose their excellent friends at Derwen Fawr. Happily for May, they had not reached her yet.

But she was one of the first to whom the good news of Meredith's return came; for Miss Edith had heard her father mention it casually, and repeated it to her. She ran home to tell her grandparents as if her feet were winged.

"He is coming! He is coming! It was true!" she said.

"Who is coming? Why, you're all agape, child," cried Peggy.

"He! Cousin Meredith," replied breathless May.

"They have set him in slippery places, then. He must take heed lest he fall," muttered Evan, which damped May's exultant hopes.

Yet Meredith's beginning satisfied his grandfather. He took up his abode at Tygwyn, and thereby roused his mother into life if not health. To be sure, he had offices provided for him not far from the new mine, and in the centre of the coal district, a house, in fact; but this was unfurnished save by desks, stools and ledgers, and he preferred living at home; that is to say, he was to have his old sleeping place, his corner in the living-room, his meals when he liked; but he told his mother that she must not expect him, under any circumstances, until she saw him, as he must necessarily be much engaged. Thus much was settled the first day of his return, before he visited Derwen Fach. This he did the same evening, accompanied by his father, who was very proud of his good-looking, prosperous son. So, in point of fact, was Evan, though he was always careful to instil humility into young people, and he fancied he saw that Meredith was somewhat set up by his rapid success in life. But May and Peggy were all admiration, and certainly if the young man had been vain-glorious, they would have helped to keep him so.

"Thank you, my lad, for your kind gift to us," said Evan, when the little party were gathered round the fire, for the March winds were keen. "You will be none the

poorer for helping your aged or sick relations. Now, tell us how you have managed to get on the blind side of Mr. Richards, who is generally wide awake in both eyes, and only sleeps with one shut and one open. I suppose you got hold of him when he was a-bed?"

"Oh, great-grandfather! how can you say such things?" remonstrated May. "Cousin Meredith did his duty, and is rewarded, as is always the case in pretty stories."

"Mr. Richards said that I knew the neighbourhood, the mines, and the men, better than anyone else, and that perhaps I might help him to keep off a strike, grandfather," said Meredith.

"Oh, is it come to that?" asked Evan, with a sort of whistle.

"Not quite," answered Laban. "But there is an outcry for more wages everywhere just now."

"What is a strike, Uncle Laban?" inquired May.

"Let me tell you, child," interrupted Evan. "It is people quarrelling with their bread and butter, and wanting honey atop of it. It is being discontented with your state. It is men refusing to work while they stand out for higher wages, and letting their families starve. It is a wicked tempting of Providence."

"The agitators do the mischief," said Meredith. "They come with their speeches and their papers to the pit's mouth, and rouse up all the bad passions of the men. Still, there is something to say on both sides."

May listened earnestly to a discussion that followed, from which she gathered that some crisis was impending that might bode evil to everyone she loved. Her exultation at Meredith's return and success in life faded into fear lest misfortune should ensue upon it, and she began to perceive that her grandfather was right in saying that contentment was the best riches. Her meditative mind, however, set itself to devise some means of averting the ills that seemed to threaten, and she wondered what she could do to help. What with her music, her unoffending gentleness, her delicate face and figure, her

devotion to her grandparents, and her eagerness to help everyone round about, she had become a general favourite, and it was doubtful whether Miss Edith or she were the more popular.

"The ladies carry good books and papers to the pit's mouth, and all our dear friends love them and like th books," she said. "And then they gave us the Institute. Nobody would harm the ladies."

"I don't think they would, little May," returned Uncle Laban. "We must have patience, and my manager, there, and I must work together," pointing to his son.

Meredith coloured to the temples at this jest, and old Peggy laughed, but May thought it unkind, since it was not Meredith's fault that he was higher than his father.

"You look like a sick sheep, May," cried Peggy. "Whatever is happening, we are safe. I'm thinking farmwork's best, after all, and wish you, Laban, was here with your father, 'stead of there with your son."

May took this to be another cut at Meredith, who, however, soon walked off with Laban as happily and contentedly as even she could wish, the former saying that he was thankful his son would be at home at night when he chanced to be in the mine.

"You don't think harm will come to Mr. Richards or Cousin Meredith, great-grandfather?" asked May, wistfully, when they were gone.

"'Tis all in God's hands, child. We must ask His help," replied Evan. "Bring the Bible, and we will read a chapter. Then we can consult him by prayer."

May did as she was bid. She and her grandparents were in the habit of reading aloud nightly from the sacred Scriptures, and she loved the large, pictured Bible, which had been her delight before she could read its contents. But now she read Welsh even better than English, and the fine old language which our ancestors, the Ancient Britons, used to speak, sounded very pleasant in her musical voice. Even the gutturals were no longer inharmonious. But Evan rolled them out with a will, as

if they belonged to him, and Peggy took infinite pains with her words, and her voice rose and fell in a sort of rhythmical cadenza, much as it did when she sang. She had a Bible with very large print to herself; but Evan and May read together, just as they had done ever since May's fever. She either sat or stood by his side, his arm round her waist, and Peggy was opposite to them. The old people had spectacles on, but even so aided would occasionally stumble at a word, when May was expected to set them right. This was not because they could not read, but from deficiency of sight, and May preferred pointing out the slight mistake with her finger to correcting it with her voice. They always read a verse in turn, and it was a good conclusion of their laborious day.

When the chapter was finished they knelt in prayer, which Evan offered extempore, and the pulsation of May's heart quickened, as he asked for guidance to be given to Mr. Richards and his people in the matter that made them anxious, and especially for direction for Meredith in his difficult position.

"The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof," he said, when he arose with difficulty from his kness, by which May understood him to mean that nothing contrary to the will of the Almighty should be done with its contents.

"Is your rheumatism worse to-night, great-grandfather?" asked May, seeing that he seemed unusually stiff.

"The wind is in the east, child, and between that and old age 'tis no wonder if I'm stiff. Give me my pipe. Maybe it will spirit me up."

May stuffed the pipe, and then she and Peggy tidied up the house, which was already quite neat, for the night. Peggy would never allow May to do any work which she deemed beyond her strength; and Mally Tybach now came daily to help in the out-of-door labours. Still, May was an excellent little housewife, though she took care not to let her grandmother fancy that she interfered with her province; for Peggy was as proud of her position as a queen of hers,

and would not allow it to be usurped. Thanks to the Misses Richards, May wrote and spelt well, and was a sufficiently good arithmetician. These, with her music, were her accomplishments, and they were sufficient for her situation in life, though she could not have passed an examination even as junior teacher in a National or Board School.

Nothing could be more perfect than the peace of the little farm during the hours of the night. Rarely did any sounds but the varied whispers, cries, or howlings of the winds disturb the quiet; and these were only occasional. Despite the much abused east wind, all was silent when May retired to her little loft, and she glanced out upon the oak woods lying tranquil in spite of it. She was soon in bed, and heard her grandmother's foot on the stairs; for, in spite of her seventy-six years, Peggy persisted in tucking her up and taking away her candle.

"God bless thee, child!"

"Good night. I hope you will both sleep well, dear grandmother."

This was their nightly leave-taking.

They all slept well until nearly daylight, when they were suddenly awakened by an unusual sound. May jumped out of bed, thinking it was either an earthquake or the judgment-day, of which she sometimes thought with alarm. She ran downstairs quickly as she was. Her grandparents were sitting up in bed, having struck a light.

"What was it? What is it?" cried she.

"An explosion! An explosion at the pit!" replied her grandfather.

CHAPTER XV.

HURRIED VISITS.

"DRESS yourself, and run for your life, child, and see what it is! God help us!" said Evan, as soon as he could collect his thoughts.

"Uncle Laban and Cousin Meredith are safe. It was nearly eight o'clock when they left last night," returned shivering, shuddering May.

"There's no knowing, child. Run you and see what it is."

May dressed as quickly as her trembling limbs would let her, and, with a short prayer to the Most High for help in this awful moment, left the house. Evan and Peggy were nearly dressed when she looked in upon them, and bade her hasten. The purple glory that comes before the rising sun was just pouring over the East, and the twittering birds were rousing up to welcome it as she ran down the garden and took the short cut to the pit through the oak wood. She heeded not the awakening eyes of the bluebells, hyacinths, and wood anemones as they glanced sleepily at her from their mossy, dew-besprinkled beds. She saw not the masses of primroses in their nests at the roots of the trees; she paused not to discover if the violets beneath the hazel bushes were sweet or scentless; but she hurried on and on while the sun was slowly rising. She was so breathless and excited that she knew not that her hastily-tied hat and handkerchief fell off by the way and remained on the mossy path behind her. But for the sudden blaze of light that dispersed the shadows she would scarcely have been conscious of the day; but as she emerged from the wood, the sky, mountains, trees, and meads were glowing beneath the golden and royally scattered gifts of the monarch of the morning.

"She hurried on and on."

Daylight enabled her to distinguish a crowd of people down below round about the pit that she had first seen when her grandfather drove her home and Meredith ran down to look at her some eight years before. Why did the scene arise to her memory at that moment? She had heard of explosions in the mines, but although there had been many serious accidents, there had been no actual explosion during her stay at Derwen. She paused in terror of what she might see if she went on. But she overcame her fears, and ran down the grassy sward to the blackened area of the pit. She heard Uncle Laban's voice, which reassured her, but saw nothing of Meredith. Colliers were hurrying to and fro, and some whom she recognised as overmen, like Laban, were there, while many women and children stood about with scared and anxious faces. She slipped in amongst them, and saw men descending the shaft. She fancied Uncle Laban was going down after them, but he did not. She waited in the hope of being able to speak to him, but he was too much occupied, so she asked one of the women what it was. For answer she only heard that no one knew as yet, but the husbands, sons, or fathers of all assembled there were below.

"Do you know where Cousin Meredith is?" asked May, with faltering voice.

"Down there too," was the answer.

Her sudden increase of terror was subdued by hope, for almost while she spoke the steam-engine, the snorting noise of which she disliked so much, drew up a corf or basket into the middle of the shaft, which, being landed, she found contained human beings. These were half a dozen boys, all black with the soot of the explosion, but apparently uninjured. Little Davy was amongst them. All but he were seized upon by expectant mothers with cries of joy and thankfulness.

"Dai! Dai Bach, come here!" cried May, as Uncle Laban and others began to question the bigger lads.

He heard her appeal, and stumbled towards her. At

this moment Uncle Laban perceived her, but was too busy to speak to her.

"What is it, Dai Bach? your face is scorched," said May.

"I don't know, I don't know," he replied, shaking his head piteously. "We boys went down to work at five. Says one, 'Let's have a spree,' and I took out my gewgaw (jewsharp) and began to play, and they began to dance just there at the bottom of the shaft. And in the midst of our spree we heard a great noise, and a scorching blast rushed past us, and we fell down for dead, crying out, 'Tis a 'splosion.' And all the rest are far in the mine, and dead perhaps by this time, as we should be if we hadn't stopped for a spree. And father's there! father's there!"

The boy began to cry, unmindful of his own hurt.

"And Cousin Meredith?" asked May, faintly.

"I don't know about him. I was abed till five, when we went down. But father's there."

"Pray for him, Dai Bach. Oh, dear! oh, dear!" wailed May.

But her wailing ceased when Uncle Laban approached.

"Run for linen to Derwen Fawr. They have not heard. Keep father and mother at home. Tell 'Lizbeth to be quiet. Send somebody to Leah," he said, all in a breath.

"And Cousin Meredith?" asked terrified May.

"In God's hands, like the rest, my girl," was the reply, as Laban turned to look down the black shaft after the corf, which was again descending.

May knew not how she was to do all Uncle Laban's bidding, but she felt that her first duty was to tell Mrs. Richards, so she ran off to their house. This lay more in a hollow than the other houses, and the report of the explosion had not reached it. It was between seven and eight when May arrived with the news, and the ladies were not down, though the eight o'clock breakfast was in preparation. She found her friend Susan in the passage,

tray in hand, and she almost let it fall when she saw May's horrified face.

"An explosion. The pit. They will want linen. Please to tell the ladies," was all May could gasp forth.

The alarm was soon given, and she was surrounded by Mrs. Richards and her daughters, who were mostly in dressing-gowns.

"What is the matter, May?" asked Edith, who came first.

"I scarcely know, Miss Edith," gasped May, recovering self-possession with breath. "But there is something terrible at the pit. We were all awakened by the explosion. Cousin Meredith, and Dai Bach's father, and Cousin Leah's husband, and I know not who else, are all down. Uncle Laban sent me here to tell you, and ask for linen. Even Dai Bach and the boys who are saved are scorched by the blast."

By this time Mrs. Richards was also at May's side.

"We must telegraph for your father. Send off to town at once. Go to the pit, Maria. We will see to the linen, oil, and everything. Don't cry, May; perhaps it is not so bad as it sounds. When these things happen in a small pit like ours the sound is often worse than the reality. Give her some breakfast, Susan."

"Thank you, ma'am, but I could not eat, and I am to go straight back home," said May, struggling for composure.

Indeed, there was little time or inclination for eating that day. Still Edith forced a piece of bread-and-butter into her hand, as she left the house as rapidly as she came. She met Nathan, a man who worked on her grandfather's little farm, who told her that one of his boys was in the pit. Still the farm labour must go on. So she found Peggy busy, and Evan preparing to leave the house, yet dawdling about, awaiting her arrival.

"Thou hast been long, child. What is it all?" he asked.

She told him all she knew. He sat down for a moment,

while Peggy stood aghast, shaking like a leaf, and exclaiming—

"Meredith! and it 'ould be the death of his mother if anything happened to him! Twm, the Cross Roads, and Leah laid by with her third baby! Dai Bach! and he nobody in the world but his father!"

May first laid her hand on Evan's shoulder, then looked appealingly at Peggy and put her arms round her.

"They may all be safe, great-grandfather. Let us try to hope till we know the worst, grandmother," she said.

"Right, child, and thou hast much to do," replied Evan, uncovering his face.

"Give her some breakfast, mother, before she goes to see after the rest, and bring us word again. We are better at home. Only in the way there."

"I couldn't eat, dear great-grandfather."

"Thou must, child."

May was so accustomed to obey that she tried to swallow some tea, which was keeping hot by the fire, and to eat the bread-and-butter which she still unconsciously held in her hand.

"You must have your breakfast too," she said, glancing from her grandparents to the untouched food on the table, spread as usual.

They sat down, but it was almost a mockery. It refreshed May, however, slight as was the meal, and she once more set off, followed by her grandfather's blessing.

She sped on, through the wood again and up the ravine, where, it will be remembered, Meredith once carried her. When she reached Tygwyn, the house was empty. There was the beehive chair, which she had seldom before seen untenanted by Aunt 'Lizbeth, staring alone at the fire, and there were the pretty toys of the dead children surrounding the walls.

"Oh! if Cousin Meredith should be taken too, what will become of Aunt 'Lizbeth?" thought May, as she stood in the centre of the deserted room, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

She ran on to another house, higher up the ravine; that, too, was empty. But the next was tenanted. Here she found little Davy with one of the other boys who came up with him from the pit. The mother of the latter had brought them both home with her, and was attending to their scorched faces and hands, which were not, however, very badly hurt. No news had reached her since they left the mouth of the pit.

"No, I'm going back to see after father. Thank you, Pal, fach," said Davy, leaving the house with May.

"I must go on to Cousin Leah," said the latter. "Come to Derwen Fach, Dai, if—if——" and so they parted.

Leaving the ravine to the left, she found herself on the little mountain. This wild spot was scattered with colliers' cottages, one of the most respectable of which was Leah's, for her husband was one of the master men, as they are called, and in good pay. He was also one of the disaffected. There were many cross roads on the mountain, one of which May took, but she met no one. "All are at the pit," she thought, as she hurried on to Leah's house.

She found her, as she knew she must, in bed, with a baby a week old by her side, and two children at play in the kitchen. A neighbour was nursing her and taking charge of them.

"Cousin May! Cousin May!" shouted the children: but she, who loved them dearly, yet passed them by unnoticed, and went to their mother's bedroom.

"What has brought you here so early?" asked Leah. Why, the oaks must have fallen, at least. Look at baby!" Then, catching sight of May's scared face, she sat up in bed and exclaimed, "What is the matter?"

"Uncle Laban sent me, cousin," gasped May.

"Yes—what for? Have they struck, and is Twm at the head of it?"

"No—not that. But there is an accident."

"What accident? Is it my husband, or father, or mother, or what? Can't you speak out, girl?"

"It is something in the pit. Several boys have come up safe, and we hope——"

Here May broke down, for she had lost hope.

"It is a visitation of Providence," shrieked Leah. "I told him so. I knew how it would be. Speak out, May."

It was difficult for May to speak out, but she told the little she knew, softening it as best she might, and holding Leah's hand. While she was so doing, Rachel came in, white as death. Seeing May, she seemed relieved.

"If you would run to mother while I stay, I should be thankful," she said. "She sent me here to Leah."

"Where is she?" asked May. "The house was empty when I was there a little while ago."

"She would go to the pit, and when we were there she nearly fainted, and I got her home again, I don't know how. Miss Sophy is with her now. Father and a lot more went down and were nearly suffocated with the smoke and dust, but they are sure there is no fire behind. They got a little way down the passage, and found it blocked up. Father and some of them came up again, and went back with picks and gads, and everything to try to clear the way. He fancied he heard a voice, but he wasn't sure. Over a hundred men and boys are down, and all the women are crowding to the pit."

"And Twm is there," sobbed Leah, while her children, who had followed their aunt, climbed upon her bed.

"And Cousin Meredith?" whispered May, interrogatively, as she stood ready to depart.

"Yes, silly that he was," replied Rachel. "When father and he came home last night he said he wasn't happy about the state of affairs, and wanted to see into them at once. If this strike was to happen, he thought the men would likely plot in the mine, and he would do his best to advise them for their good. So he had his supper and a nap, and went away in spite of mother's prayers."

"Good-bye, Cousin Leah. I think we shall have comfort by-and-by," said May, putting her arm round poor

Leah's neck and kissing her. "Let me look at baby before I go."

This recalled the mother to the child, and in displaying the tiny infant Leah found, already, some of May's comfort, though much overlaid with anxiety.

When May again reached Tygwyn 'Lizbeth was seated in the beehive chair, surrounded by women. Miss Sophy was still there, and much conversation was going on. Aunt 'Lizbeth's companions belonged to the men who had slept at home the previous night and were now engaged in striving to clear the passage to the mine. May made her way through them to her aunt.

"Leah and the baby are well, Aunt 'Lizbeth," she said.

"What's that to me, and Meredith dead in the mine, and Laban gone down to kill himself too!" wailed 'Lizbeth. "And I who have buried seven, two full grown from the pit, three babes in arms, and two growing up like young lambs! *Hach y fi! Hach y fi!*"

"There, come you, 'Lizbeth. You'll be seeing Meredith walk in by now," comforted the women.

"I will go now you are come, May," said Miss Sophy. "One of my sisters has gone to see Peggy," and she left, followed gradually by the other visitors.

Thus May was left alone with Aunt 'Lizbeth during Rachel's protracted absence.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PIT.

Poor Aunt 'Lizbeth had no peace herself, and permitted none to May. Indeed, peace was impossible under the pressure of intense anxiety that weighed down every

individual at Derwen. May was sent hither and thither until her limbs were weary and her head ached; but she was unconscious of fatigue and pain. To and fro—to and fro—from cottage to pit, from pit to cottage, with ever the same result. As the day wore on she saw that the crowds about the pit thickened, for engineers and master-men arrived from a distance, and half the inhabitants of the village of Derwen came and went. She listened to the broken conversation of the people; she questioned one and another; she even ventured to look down the black, horrible shaft. She turned giddy as she perceived how deep the pit must be from the specks of light that glimmered at the bottom of the shaft, and shrunk back as the working engine brought men or rubbish to the surface, swinging the corves frightfully before they landed. But these came into the light of day, whereas the volunteers who descended from time to time were lost in utter darkness. She heard Uncle Laban's voice more than once encouraging the men, and the sound of other voices reached her from time to time, and the echo of the pickaxes and other tools used to remove the mighty obstacles that blocked up the passage.

She heard every sort of conjecture hazarded concerning the cause of the explosion. Some said it was failure of ventilation, but this was negatived, because it was affirmed the ventilation had been perfect ever since the Meredith shaft had been sunk. Before that there had been no free current of air, as there was only the Derwen shaft, which was, so to express it, the only chimney to the great underground town. May was surprised to hear it called by her cousin's name; but Mr. Richards had so often said he had found the new seam of coal through Meredith Morrison, that it got to be named after him. She now understood for the first time how it was that air was obtained by sinking new shafts in various parts. Others suggested that shot-firing to make drifts must have caused the accident, others gas, many the carelessness of the colliers in the use of their lamps—in short, every possible

reason was urged by the people outside for what remained still a mystery underground.

"How can they know the cause when nobody has come out of the pit to tell them?" asked puzzled May of her grandfather.

"They will be talking nonsense rather than nothing," replied Evan.

May had run home for a short space while a neighbour was with 'Lizbeth. The patient old people had remained in the farm all day, picking up such news as stray passers-by brought them; but when evening approached and the day's work was done, May persuaded them to return with her to Tygwyn.

"It is so lonely for you here, great-grandfather," she argued; "and if you are with Aunt 'Lizbeth you will comfort her while I run to and from the mine to bring the news. I asked Mally if she would stay in the house, and she said she would. Her boys were at home when it happened, so she is not anxious as we and Nathan are."

"Bless your dear heart, you think of everything," exclaimed Peggy. "Let's have some tea and be going."

Peggy's one idea of consolation and restoration was tea, and in May's wearied state it was not a bad one. She was thankful for its pleasant aroma and vivifying qualities.

"We are too sad to think of you, Hedfa; or you, old pussy," she said, as the dog and cat took up their customary positions on either side of her. "Yet they mustn't starve, grandmother, must they, because we cannot eat?" she added, making the saucer of sop which they always shared, and placing it on the brick hearth before the fire.

Their helpful, stirring char-woman, Mally, came in from driving the cow afield after milking, and the trio started for Tygwyn. It seemed to May that Evan was more rheumatic than usual, for he could scarcely get on at all, and such help as she, Peggy, and his stick could give him availed but little. However, they reached

Tygwyn at last. They found Rachel there, who had brought the news that the indefatigable workers were making way through the enormous mass of coal and rubbish, and hoped soon to clear a hole big enough to creep through. She was thankful for the arrival of the little party, as she was obliged to return to Leah, who was even worse than her mother. 'Lizbeth consoled herself by giving vent to her complainings, but Leah was too excited either to cry or wail. They were but samples of the score or more of women whose "bread winners" were buried, alive or dead, in that awful pit.

"I am thinking Laban has had no tea," said Peggy, when she was sufficiently recovered to speak.

"What could be the good of tea and he down in the earth?" moaned 'Lizbeth, rocking herself, yet unconsciously knitting a stocking she had begun for Meredith.

"But he comes up in his turn, Aunt 'Lizbeth. They would be choked if they remained down," remarked May. "Let me take Uncle Laban his tea. Someone else would be glad of it if he can't drink it. Let us make a big pitcher full, and carry it to the pit."

"There's wise she is!" whispered old Peggy.

The suggestion was so good that it was acted upon. The kettle was boiled and almost all 'Lizbeth's stock of tea infused in no time. This was poured into a good-sized milk tin with a lip to it, all the milk the house afforded, and plenty of sugar added, and the steaming beverage was ready.

"Thou canst not carry it, child," exclaimed Evan, as May took hold of the handle already very hot.

"Yes, I can, great-grandfather, with a tea-kettle holder. My pitcher at home holds more than this," returned May.

And she set out down the ravine with her boiling charge and a mug fastened to her waist. But she had not counted the cost. The heat penetrated not only the tin but the tea-kettle holder and her clothes. It was too

heavy to hold at a distance from her body, and she must have set it down in despair but for unexpected aid.

This came in the person of Cousin George, the young doctor, son, as we have said, of one of Evan's daughters, who had married a respectable farmer living at a distance. He resided in Derwen, and was so busy that he rarely visited his grandparents. May was rather afraid of him, for he had a decided manner, and was somewhat of a beau, wore wonderful overalls, and a still more wonderful hat. Nevertheless he had the reputation of being a capital doctor, and was much liked by the colliers and Mr. Richards. He had been to see Leah, and was hurrying to the pit when he stumbled upon May standing over her can in the middle of the ravine.

"What have you got there, May? Haven't they plenty of milk at Derwen Fach?"

"Oh, Cousin George, it is Uncle Laban's tea, and I am afraid it will be cold before I get to the pit," she replied.

"Let me carry it for you. My word! it is hot and heavy."

"Take the kettle-holder, cousin. How kind of you!" she said, running by his side while he strode down the ravine.

He asked her if there was anything new at the pit, and then told her that Leah had fever and that her baby was ill. Also that he had been called in to other invalids affected by what was going on. He grew confidential as they proceeded, and poured forth a few bottled-up grievances, which proved to her that he had a kind heart even though he was so grand. Her heart, however, was with Meredith and the other imprisoned ones down below.

"There's Jones, Pengro, can't move for collier's asthma," he said. "He's done for at sixty. Lewis, Llanfer, on his back from a pit accident, teaching himself to read at seventy. Old Mall, the Mill, who has brought up a family on six shillings a week, talking of going to the parish because they all marry while they are children and

can't help her. Then they get drunk and beat their wives, and grumble and strike."

"I know—I know," put in May, with one of her old nods.

"Don't you marry early, May," he added, sagely. "Wait till you're five-and-twenty at the least."

"That's what grandmother says. But she was only seventeen; and I shall never marry while they want me," said May.

They reached the pit just as a corf that had come up full of rubbish was about to descend, bearing one or two men.

"Please to take down Uncle Laban's tea," cried May, and she had never before shouted so loud.

Dr. George handed the tin and the mug to the men, with the words, "It is precious hot." May watched the great basket vacillate in the centre of the shaft, which was some fourteen feet in circumference, then knock, as she fancied, against the sides, and finally disappear down the black abyss.

"I am afraid the tea will be spilt," she sighed.

But it reached the bottom in safety, and was received with exclamations of thankfulness by those working below, whose throats were parched and filled with heat and dust. Indeed, it seemed to give them strength, for while May was yet lingering at the mouth of the pit a shout echoed from its depths, and the words, "We have got through at last," were heard. She thought that all was now over, and they would at least know the worst; but only a comparatively small aperture was made, through which came such a volume of grime and smoke as nearly to suffocate the workers. It did, in effect, overpower Laban, who was obliged to be drawn up, for he was quite exhausted. He had been among the first to descend. May ran towards him.

"I—I—am sure I heard—a voice," he gasped, as Dr. George went to him, unfastened his neckcloth, and bade the crowd stand apart. It was air that he wanted, and

he soon recovered his breath, and asked for more tea. "It saved us," he added, and May was thankful.

There was water, but no tea at hand, and Dr. George urged upon Laban to return home and rest awhile. But he would not hear of it.

"You want something different from tea," said Dr. George, pouring a restorative down his throat, which revived him, for the doctor had previously placed in a shed hard by all sorts of medical appliances to be ready for emergencies.

May asked in a whisper, as she knelt by her uncle's side, if it was Meredith's voice he heard; but he said that he could not distinguish whose it was. When he was sufficiently recovered to answer questions, however, he replied to all the inquiries of the anxious people who surrounded him. He had not much to tell that was not already known. Whatever and wherever the explosion, it had blown a mass of matter into the passage to the mine, through which, by dint of pick, gad, and borer, they had effected an aperture large enough to speak to anyone on the other side, if anyone were there. When they had warned them they were thinking of blasting, and so working a hole big enough to creep through. While he was speaking Mr. Richards arrived in hot haste. His wife and daughters and the vicar had been there by turns all the day. His presence was a relief to everyone. The crowd withdrew to a distance while he spoke to Laban, who told May to go home, as it was no place for her, and she could be of no use. Mr. Richards brought the chief engineer with him, and neither person nor thing was now wanting to ensure the escape of those in so much peril. The last words that May heard as she obeyed Laban's order to return home were from Mr. Richards.

"We have set everyone to work at the other shaft," he said.

It was dark when May reached Tygwyn. The house was full of neighbours, and she had not been wanted; but the news she brought were "glad tidings" to all, though

they seemed of no great importance. By degrees the neighbours cleared out, and she was alone with 'Lizbeth and her grandparents. A messenger had come to say that Leah was too ill to be left, and that Rachel was compelled to stay with her. In this emergency May was the one active element at Tygwyn. 'Lizbeth could do nothing but talk and wail, and the old people were incapable of much exertion. Evan preached patience, and Peggy, as usual, put on a cheerful countenance, but it was May who spread the supper, and tidied up the hearth, and urged her elders to do what she could not do herself, to eat and drink, lest they, too, should be exhausted like Uncle Laban.

"What's the use of all this? Everybody's dead or dying," wailed 'Lizbeth, rocking to and fro, yet knitting still.

"Perhaps they may be all rescued soon, and Cousin Meredith may come home and want his supper," urged May, striving to believe in her own words.

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed Peggy. "You are not thinking of that, 'Lizbeth fach! No good to be looking on the dark side. There's cheerful May is."

"Why not? 'Tisn't her daughter! 'Tisn't her son! 'Tisn't her husband! Woe is me! Woe is me!"

May crept to her grandfather's side, and put her arm round his neck. It shocked her to find that 'Lizbeth did not understand that Meredith was dear to her as a brother, Laban as a father, and even Leah *almost* as a sister. But Evan understood her well.

"She doesn't know what she's saying, child. But thou lovest them all tenderly," he said, putting his arm round her waist.

"I think I would gladly give my poor life for theirs, great-grandfather," replied May, with a little sob.

"I know, I understand, child. Thou canst give them thy prayers instead," rejoined Evan, with a choking voice.

"I do—I do. I was praying all the time I laid the

supper, when Aunt 'Lizbeth thought I did not care," whispered May.

But poor 'Lizbeth, like many another, thought her own grief the sorest, and very sore it was. May crept back to her, and kneeling down at her lap, the only way she could ever conveniently reach her in that all-enveloping chair, stroked gently the hand that held Meredith's stocking, and said simply—

"I am very, very sorry for you, dear Aunt 'Lizbeth."

The stocking dropped from the trembling fingers, and the poor, irritable, afflicted woman laid her head on May's golden crown. It was an affecting scene, and as the firelight touched it, and Evan and Peggy drew their chairs near, as they sat on either side, the touching picture seemed to complete itself. Individual, personal, childlike sympathy was what poor Aunt 'Lizbeth wanted, and May gave it with all the loving sincerity of youth.

Soon after this Aunt 'Lizbeth fell into a doze, and May persuaded the others to lie down on Meredith's bed. For herself, she could not rest, and sleep seemed to have fled from her, when, at Evan's request, she wrapped herself in a shawl and laid down on the settle near Aunt 'Lizbeth. She was listening—listening all the night; and even when slumber stole upon her for a moment, the dropping of a coal or the soughing of the wind without roused her, and she would think it was a footstep.

But no one came, and so the night wore through.

CHAPTER XVII.

MEREDITH AND MAY.

Almost at break of day May went down to the pit. There were not many people about it, and most of the

men seemed to be below. But she gathered at once that the passage had been sufficiently cleared to admit of individuals creeping through the mass on hands and knees, and she learnt that Uncle Laban had gone in with some others. She stood awhile, with clasped hands and dilated eyes, gazing down into the terrible abyss. Mr. Richards and Dr. George arrived while she was so standing, and the latter said that she would be better at home and in bed.

"I know—I know; but I cannot rest while they are in there," she replied.

The work of clearance was still going on, and the corves were continually ascending and descending. Mr. Richards himself went down. Shortly after, Miss Edith appeared, and May ran to her as to a friend and protectress. More people assembled by degrees, and once more the scene was alive with anxious faces and suppressed voices.

Suddenly, a shout was heard from below. The crowd fell back as if it had been an earthquake, then pressed forward to gaze down into the pit.

"They are found! They are saved!" cried May to Edith.

"We must not be too hopeful," replied the latter.

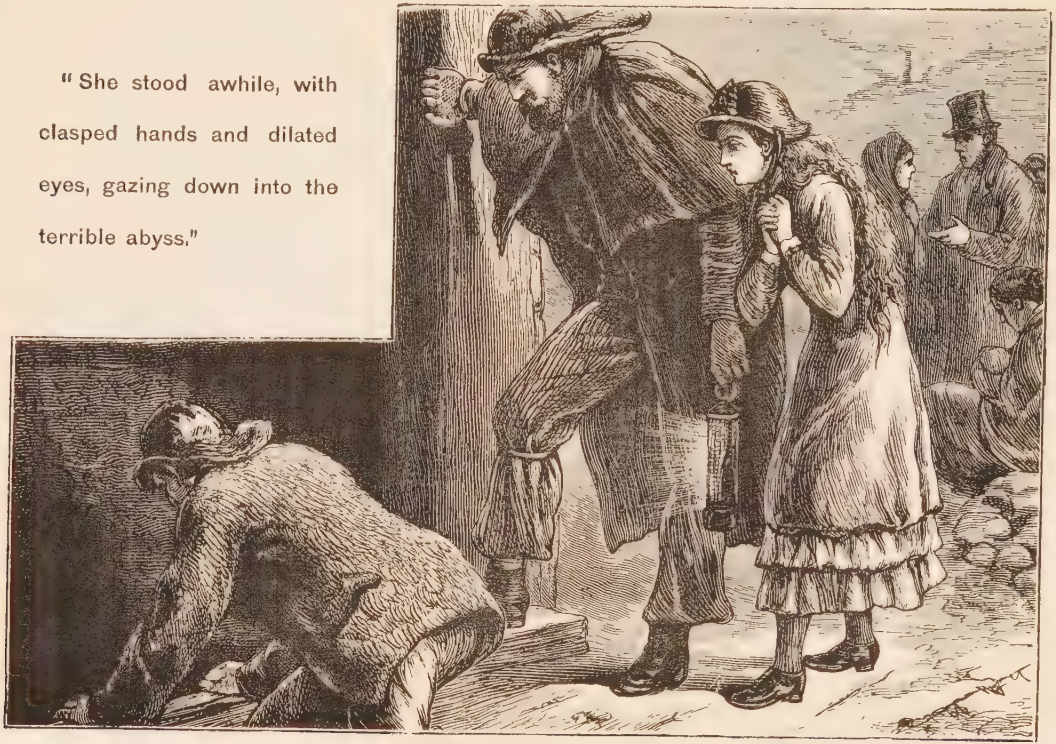
The silence that ensued was awful. The spectators scarcely breathed in their intensity of expectation. They discovered, however, that the shout arose when a huge mass of obstructive matter had given way and afforded free ingress to the mine. In course of time, men came up with the news that they had heard voices, in some distant part, singing hymns, and a burst of thanksgiving welcomed the intelligence.

"They are ready for the worst, then," whispered May.

"They always support one another by singing," responded Edith.

These young girls were so excited and harrowed by expectation that they could not leave the spot, and May, for once, forgot the anxious friends at home. At last the echo of another shout reached them, and May nearly fell

"She stood awhile, with clasped hands and dilated eyes, gazing down into the terrible abyss."



to the ground with the emotion it caused, but Edith supported her. Living beings had been found. Shortly afterwards a corf appeared, mounting steadily the gloomy shaft, out of which stepped strong men supporting, or even carrying, their weaker and exhausted brothers. Every one pressed round them, and they were received with cries of joy by those to whom they belonged. But no Meredith was there. Here a wife wept over a husband, there a mother over a son; but they were weakened by long abstinence, and bruised and burnt, so that Dr. George had to see to them at once.

"Some are alive, some are dead," were the words that reached May.

At last she turned so sick and faint, that Edith insisted on taking her back to Tygwyn. They had scarcely related what they had seen and heard, when there was a sound as of many voices outside in the ravine.

May rushed to the door. She saw a crowd approaching, and, in another moment, Laban appeared, staggering as he walked. He passed into the house with the words, "Don't be frightened; he is not dead, only—only—hurt," and then he sank down, covered his face, and began to cry like a child.

Wife, father, mother surrounded him, but May remained to watch the procession that followed. Colliers were bearing some sort of stretcher, and, as she ran forward to meet it, she perceived that Meredith was laid upon it. She screamed involuntarily, but was partly relieved by the sound of his dear voice—

"I am all right, Cousin May," he said, hearing her shriek.

They carried him into the house and laid him on his bed; then all, save Dr. George, who was with him, hastened back to the pit. Laban was too exhausted to speak, and May almost feared that he would die, there and then.

"Get me the cordial from the cupboard. Boil up the kettle," came from an unexpected voice.

It was 'Lizbeth, roused to exertion and self-reliance by sights that would have cowed stronger women. Edith helped May to do what she ordered, while Evan and Peggy prevailed on Laban to go to bed. Father and son were equally incapable, and they had been rendered so by their self-devotion to others. Dr. George went from one to the other, so did 'Lizbeth; but May knew that she was best trying to comfort her grandparents.

"What is it?" she asked of Dr. George.

"I scarce know yet," was the vague reply; "but many are worse off than we are. It is awful at the pit, and I must go back, though Dr. Lewis, and Jones, the Myntai, have arrived. Some have been brought up dead, others dying, all more or less hurt. The explosion must have been dreadful, and they couldn't have held out much longer."

"What of Twm?" asked Evan.

"Dead, I am afraid, grandfather!"

"What will become of Leah and the children?" cried May.

"I will go to them at once, and bring word how she is," said Miss Edith, her face almost as pale and horror-stricken as May's.

Soon after Edith was gone, Mr. Richards appeared, accompanied by his friend Dr. Lewis, an experienced physician. While the doctor was with Meredith, Mr. Richards told Evan that he understood Meredith had, in some way as yet unknown, saved many lives—all, indeed, that were saved—and there were not so many killed as Dr. George had said; but Leah's husband was amongst them.

"And he was the head of the threatened strike," he added, while poor Evan groaned aloud.

By degrees, however, some sort of calm succeeded the storm, and it was found necessary to keep the house perfectly quiet, because Laban was exhausted by long labour and want of sleep, while Meredith was not only seriously scorched, but, the doctors feared, had fever from the

strain and excitement he had passed through, the extent of which was not known until afterwards. Still, they did not apprehend danger.

"We are only in the way, mother; let us be going. The child is of use, and can stop," said Evan to Peggy. "Now that 'Lizbeth is roused up, they won't want for nursing."

"We have never before been parted," cried May, clinging to her grandfather. "What will you do without me?"

"We shall muddle along somehow, and be glad to have thee back, please God," replied Evan, as he and Peggy left Tygwyn with many a tear and many a prayer.

"The child," as Evan still loved to call May, was, indeed, of use. She had long found her vocation in her loving care of her grandparents; she now found it as a nurse. Laban was ill, Meredith seriously injured, and she had ample opportunity of showing her gratitude to them for their kindness to her. Not that she thought of gratitude; her feelings were all love and tender pity. 'Lizbeth's powers varied, for unnatural energy will not last for ever. Still she was roused to more exertion than she had shown since the loss of two sons by a mining accident. But it was a pitiful state of things. All she had in the world was at stake—husband, son, daughter, all down at once. As to Leah, her life was despaired of. When it was made known to her that her husband was amongst those brought up dead from the mine, she had brain fever. Of course, Rachel could not leave her for long together, and was only able to see her father and brother for a few minutes at a time, and at long intervals.

Journals contain frequent accounts of coal-mine accidents, but outsiders do not realise what they are. This at Derwen cast many families into despair, while it served to bring out the good in all. Less than a dozen men and boys were actually killed, but many were injured. Amongst the killed was little Davy's father, and he, poor

lad, was orphaned. May's compassionate heart felt for him—for all; and when Edith, or one of her sisters, came from time to time to see after the family at Tygwyn, they harrowed her with details. Indeed, all the neighbours seemed, to her sensitive mind, almost to take a pleasure in recounting their own or their friends' miseries.

She was truly thankful that, when the day of the funerals of those killed arrived, she was unable to attend. But 'Lizbeth went, and Laban insisted on rising from his bed to accompany her. Indeed, he was by that time sufficiently recovered. The Welsh are very strict in their observance of all ceremonies, whether gay or sad. Marriages and burials are equally numerously attended. Thus, when Laban and 'Lizbeth left the house in their respectable mourning, they were joined by many friends, who accompanied them to poor Leah's desolate abode.

May was left alone with Meredith, and very sad and solemn were her thoughts on that melancholy day. Not a sound was heard in the house save the ticking of the clock and the rippling of the brook without; for Meredith was to be kept free from all excitement. His face was swathed in linen, having been much burnt; and as May sat quietly by his side, she did not know if he were awake or asleep. She had not yet heard the details of the explosion, for the inquests had only been held the previous day, and many inquiries were still pending.

Suddenly she started, for she heard singing in the ravine, and was afraid of its effect on Meredith. She realised that the funeral procession was about to pass before the curtained windows, and that they were singing hymns as they bore the mortal remains of more than one relative or friend to their last home. She involuntarily put her fingers in her ears and suppressed a cry

"Read me the funeral service, May," came from her cousin, as he lay apparently passive.

"I am afraid. You must be quiet, dear cousin," she replied.

"You need not fear; it will soothe me. But for the mercy of God I should be there."

May shuddered, but she fetched a Prayer-book from the shelf in the living-room, and did as Meredith wished. The wailing hymn died away as she began to read, and she felt as if voice and strength had departed from her. But they came back by degrees, and she selected portions from the solemn and beautiful service, which she read as well as her tears would let her. This lasted some time, but was ended at last.

"Now play and sing me some hymns," said Meredith.

"Dear cousin, it will excite you," pleaded May.

"No; it will soothe me as the service has done," he replied. "I was excited before, now I am calm."

His room was on the ground floor, and opened into the kitchen; so she went to the harmonium, leaving the door ajar. She played and sang as softly as she could, and surely such sounds could only soothe the soul, for they were so sweet as to resemble angel music.

"Go on, dear May, go on," he would say, when she paused; and she sang hymn after hymn, chant after chant, going to and fro to him between.

"Now play me something of Handel's," he whispered.

And her tremulous fingers played over the chords.

When she went to him again he was asleep, and she remembered how he had once sung to her when she was ill, and she asked God to bless the voice He had given her for her cousin's good. As she sat by his bedside she laid her head against his pillow, and, wearied out by the excitement and wretchedness of the previous days, she too slumbered.

She was aroused by her cousin's voice, and hastened to bring him some nourishment, which was simmering by the fire. She was obliged to put it to his lips, for his bandages prevented his seeing.

"Thank you, dear," he said. "I feel much better. Now let me tell you how it all happened."

"You must not, Cousin Meredith," cried she, alarmed "I am to keep you quite quiet."

"Only a few sentences, but I must tell you myself. There, hold my hand, and I shall be quite calm. When I went into the mine I found them talking and whispering in knots. I knew something was wrong, but dared not interfere. They worked sulkily and avoided me, giving me to understand I had raised myself to oppress them. Poor Twm, and David, the Mill, were the worst. At last I told them that the master was going to give them musical instruments and a trained instructor in the mines, and that he thought of our competing for the prizes at the Crystal Palace next year.

"'Tis more money, not more music we want," said some; but the rest gathered round me, while I said all I could think of against a strike, and for obedience to law and order. We were standing in an out-of-the-way part, as one may say; the few discontented slunk off from us. In a moment we heard a terrific noise, and the explosion took place. Though we were knocked down we were miraculously preserved, but we heard the screams of the others, and as soon as we recovered our senses, tried to make our way to them. We were scorched and hurt, but not destroyed. But oh! the agony of that day and night. We who were saved did what we could to find the others, but it was pitch dark, for all our lamps had gone out. You know the rest. Father found us first; then the other good friends came and released us, thank God!"

"Then it was those who were true to their duty who were saved?" asked May.

"I scarcely know. But those who were for the strike were killed. It was horrible."

"Then that is what great-grandfather meant when he said it was 'the judgment of the Lord.' Now you must not talk any more. I think it is all over at the church by this time, and uncle and aunt will soon be back. Miss Edith told me that Mr. Richards was going to take great-grandfather and grandmother with him in the carriage."

"Has Miss Edith been here to-day, Cousin May?"

"Not since yesterday; they are all going to attend the funerals. How sad—how very sad it seems!"

"Poor Leah! God help her!" ejaculated Meredith. "I would give much to have saved Twm."

"Try not to think of it, cousin; try to sleep," said May, while tears were streaming down her own cheeks. "I must have the tea ready against they come back. Aunt 'Lizbeth will want it. How strange and sad it is!"

"Leave the door open that I may hear you," said Meredith, "silence is so melancholy."

And thus May went quietly about her work, drawing back the blinds and making all look cheerful, while her heart was sorrowful. And Meredith listened.

"I hope they are all in heaven," she said to herself, thinking that the time was very long, and wishing for Uncle Laban's return.

CHAPTER XVIII

WEDDINGS.

Many changes took place amongst our friends which were the result of the explosion. Leah slowly recovered from her illness, but her infant died. Meredith also recovered from the shock and injuries he had sustained. During the ensuing few months it was arranged that Leah and her two children should live with her father and mother, and that Meredith should occupy the house provided for the managar of the mines. This was much insisted on by Mr. Richards, who had conceived a high opinion of Meredith's fidelity, zeal, and shrewdness. Indeed, he considered that the submission of some of the men who had resolved to strike was due as much to the young man's reasoning as to horror at the explosion.

Evan and Peggy had been so much distressed by the grief of little Davy at his father's funeral that they had actually taken the lad home with them to Derwen Fach. May was much delighted at this, though they scarcely knew what to do with him, and found it difficult to make him a temporary shakedown amongst the cheeses in the loft. But in the course of time Meredith came to the rescue. He asked and received permission from Mr. Richards to take the poor boy into his office as a sort of clerk, volunteering to teach him what was necessary; and thus Davy found a protector and Meredith a devoted friend.

As Mr. Richards was compelled to be a good deal absent from home, much responsibility fell upon Meredith. The name of his house was Penpant, or the Head of the Brook, and it was some distance from Derwen Fach, being near a more important mineral district. Laban still continued overman, or gaffer, as it is familiarly called, of the old pit, while his son was more especially overseer of the new—was, as the word imports, manager of all the works in the district. As father and son went hand in hand, affairs gradually resumed their old aspect, and school and institute were well attended.

While these events took place May was diligently pursuing her organ studies. She had a lesson once a week at Derwen Church, and went there to practise as often as she could. Her master was much struck with her musical genius, as well as with her voice, and urged her devoting herself to music as a profession. But she had always in her mind the thought "They cannot do without me." Indeed, she would have been loth to be away from home so much for her lessons and practice, had not Mally been secretly hired by Meredith to remain all and every day at Derwen Fach. Thus the young, as is meet, laboured for the old.

During the autumn Rachel was married, and May was bridesmaid, Meredith being best man, or "Tailor," as the Welsh call it. There was a grand "bidding" at Tygwyn, and it seemed strange to May to remember melancholy

funerals in the spring, and to look at the widowed Leah and her orphan children, while all was mirth and gaiety on Rachel's account. But she had been a good daughter, and now that Leah had taken her place, could marry without feeling that her parents were neglected. Sorrow had greatly softened Leah's character, and she could now scarcely make enough of May, who was much devoted to her children.

Everybody came to Rachel's "bidding," and May, who had never been at a wedding before, felt important when she presented a piece of rosemary to each of the guests, in return for such gifts or loans as they brought with them. The church was crowded, and it was quite an imposing ceremony; but, in May's eyes, no one looked so handsome as her "Fairy Prince." Mrs. Richards and her daughters were amongst those who came to Tygwyn with wedding presents after the ceremony, and May thought that she had never seen so nice a young lady as Miss Edith. She said so to Meredith, and was almost surprised at his emphatic "Yes; there is no one so good and pretty—except, perhaps, you, Cousin May."

We cannot wonder if colour mounted to May's fair face at this compliment from one she loved so well. But she fancied and feared that Meredith cared more for Miss Edith than was good for one in his position of life. She thought she had never been so merry as she was on that wedding day, and she found herself asking her grandmother if her mother's wedding had been so bright and cheerful. Peggy shook her head, and replied that it could not be so, because Evan had disapproved of the match, and would not sanction it.

"She was married from Tygwyn, you know, and I only saw the wedding by the sly," said old Peggy. "But it was pretty enough, and your father was a good-looking man, with a smart coat and a lot of long, dark hair. Not like yours, child. They said that was how those painting people wore their hair. Pity he should ever have seen our Mary, for we never heard a word about her till that

letter came from Mr. Everton. She was pretty! why, you can't light a candle to her."

"Oh, no, grandmother," sighed May. "I suppose she had never such funny hair as mine."

"Smooth as a golden pippin, child," replied Peggy.

The day after the wedding, May went to Derwen for her lesson. When she was leaving the church she was met by the vicar, and, to her joy and surprise, Mr. Everton was with him.

"Oh, dear sir, I am so glad!" she exclaimed, as he took both her small hands in his.

"How much you are grown!" he said, looking at her kindly. "I have been listening to your lesson, and wonder still more at your growth in music. I have my holiday late this year, and have run down to see you—and—your kind friends. I will walk with you to Derwen Fawr."

They set out side by side, no longer hand in hand.

"I suppose I am too old," sighed May to herself. "I wish I could be always young." She was not yet sixteen!

"Have you found Mrs. Pope, sir?" was her first question.

"No, May; I have quite lost sight of her. Indeed, I have myself removed from that part of London. I have been so fortunate as to have a living presented to me at Norwood, and—— How are Mr. Richards and his family?"

"Quite well, thank you, sir; and so are great-grandfather and grandmother, considering their age. We have all recovered from the explosion that I wrote to you about, and Cousin Rachel was married yesterday."

"But for you, May, I should never have known all these good people, seen this lovely country, or heard from —your kind friend, Miss Edith. Is she at home?"

May looked up at Mr. Everton as she replied in the affirmative. There was a vibration in his voice that touched a chord in her heart.

"It is long since you were here last, sir. I think Miss Edith has been sorry, and so have I."

"What reason have you for supposing your friend was sorry, May?"

"Because she looked so sad when she said she liked you very much."

They walked on a little way in silence. At last he resumed—

"Perhaps I may be grateful to you all my life for bringing me to these parts. You shall know to-morrow morning, when I will come and see you and your friends. I am now going by invitation to Derwen Fawr. I wrote to say I was once more in the neighbourhood."

"But you are *my* friend, sir. *I* knew you first," returned May, with a sort of reproach in her voice.

"I hope we are friends for life, dear child," he rejoined, as he remarked the grieved expression of her face.

They reached the institute, and he asked if he might go in and see what had been done since he was there last on the opening day. They entered, and there, busily arranging books and papers, was Miss Edith.

"Are you not glad that he has come again?" whispered May, when a somewhat confused greeting had passed.

But Edith did not answer. Instead she spoke of May, and told Mr. Everton how that she would soon be organist, and that she was already the chief accompanist in the choir practices.

"For we mean to compete for the prize at the Crystal Palace, Mr. Everton," put in May; "and I shall go to London once more."

"Then you will not be far from my new home at Norwood," returned Mr. Everton, glancing at Edith, not May.

"The institute is empty now, but it will be full to-night," said Edith, blushing. "You will come to luncheon, Mr. Everton?"

All three involuntarily recalled a similar invitation near the spot where they were standing some eight years before.

They left the room together, and when they reached the path to Derwen Fach they separated, May wending her way thoughtfully homewards, the others walking very slowly towards the awaiting luncheon.

Why were May's thoughts troubled? and why were they much divided between Mr. Everton, Cousin Meredith, and Miss Edith? She could scarcely tell; but she felt half disposed to repine as she gradually realised that she had been perhaps only the stepping-stone to the happiness of others. Should she lose those she loved so well? she asked herself. And would Meredith be content to work on when Miss Edith was gone? Life seemed a strange problem to her youthful mind, and she could not quite understand why Mr. Everton, who was her friend first, should forsake her for another, and be a guest where she was only admitted as, at best, a poor little scholar.

"Wool-gathering again, child?" cried old Peggy, as she walked slowly up the garden with her head down. "We've been waiting this half-hour, and grandfather won't go to dinner without you."

She quickened her steps, and a bright smile replaced the temporary gravity as she joined Peggy, standing with her arms akimbo.

"Thou art late, child. I am fearing that this music will make too much of a lady of thee for our poor ways," said Evan, as she entered the house.

"Why, great-grandfather? Cousin Meredith says it only makes the miners better and more contented. You know it has charmed stones and trees; and I think that pretty story of the lady who, by music, came back to this world from somewhere below it, is just like our miners, who are singing in the mine, singing all the way up, and then singing at night at the institute."

"You're all music-mad, child!" exclaimed Peggy, emptying a saucepan of steaming potatoes into a dish. "I wonder any of you are eating at all. Nothing will be serving us now but 'the Crystal Palace,' and competing for this cup and that, and a gold cup, they are saying.

Why, there's nothing so clean as well washen ware, to my thinking; so why should you be travelling all the way up to London to try for what isn't so good as what you've got at home?''

"Oh, grandmother, it is the hope, the practice, the anxiety! It is something to look forward to. Only fancy! five hundred of us meeting from all the mines, and going up to London, to sing before the Queen perhaps. And we shall not be nervous, because we are so many."

"Eat your dinner, child, and try to be content with your present lot. One state of life is just as good as another, if we can but think so. Thou hast no appetite with all this excitement."

"Yes, great-grandfather, thank you, I am very hungry indeed. The more I sing the more I eat, like the old fairies, you know."

"Haw! haw! haw! You are a queer one," laughed Peggy.

Then May told them about Mr. Everton, and before they had finished dinner was reconciled to her lot in life, and ready to help in the household work.

But the following morning her grandmother again accused her of wool-gathering, for she was thinking of Mr. Everton, and looking for him. He came, in fact, at midday, and she ran down to the gate to meet him. Evan was afield harvesting, and Peggy in the dairy, so they had the kitchen to themselves. Mr. Everton sat down on the settle, May on her favourite low stool near it. It would almost seem as if she knew how pretty she looked in that spot, with the firelight gleaming through her hair's golden threads. The cat jumped instantaneously on her lap, and she put her elbow on one knee, and leaning her fair cheek on her hand, looked up into the face of her earliest living friend. She had never seen that generally grave face so bright before.

"May, I have good news to tell you," he began at once. "Your kind friend, Edith, has consented to be my wife,

with the approval of her parents. But for you I should never have seen her, and you are the first to whom I bring the 'happy tidings.'"

"Oh, sir, I am so glad—and—so sorry," she said, hesitating a little.

"Sorry, May? I thought you would rejoice with us, your friends."

"I do, dear sir, I do. Only now I shall lose you both."

Involuntarily tears came into her sweet eyes, but she brushed them quickly away, and replaced them by a smile.

"I understand you, May. We have both loved Edith ever since we knew her; but you will lose what I shall gain."

"Yes, dear sir. But I am glad for you and her."

She held out her hand spontaneously, and there was nothing selfish in the pang that pierced her heart. It was for Meredith, because she feared he, too, cared for Miss Edith as one in his position should not have cared.

Peggy came in and interrupted an interview that was almost painful to May, strive as she would to think it pleasant. Mr. Everton did not remain long; he was in a hurry to return to his betrothed.

"Can I tell them, dear sir?" she whispered,

"Yes. There is no longer any secret, May."

So when her grandfather came in she told the news.

"Just like Richards, Derwen Fawr," laughed old Peggy. "He do know where to find butter for his bread. So long as the parson was a curate so long he mustn't marry Miss Edith; but when he is the vicar he do get his consent."

"Oh, grandmother!" exclaimed May, scandalized.

"The way of the world, child," remarked Evan.

"But they are very happy, great-grandfather, and I am very glad," returned May, striving to feel as she spoke.

But that evening she was sorry again, for Meredith came, and no sooner was he seated than his grandmother told the news. None but May understood his change of colour; only she knew that there was bitter disappointment in the young man's cup.

"Just as well not have come!" cried old Peggy, when he suddenly jumped up and wished them a hasty good-night.

May followed him, and he beckoned her down the garden into the moonlit lane. They stood there a few minutes together in silence, then he said, huskily—

"Grandfather is right, May; ambition is destruction. Mr. Everton has kept in his place, and has got all he wished. I have risen above mine, and lost all I strove to rise for."

"Dear Cousin Meredith, you are beloved and esteemed by everyone. You will be a great man some day; you are my fairy prince," replied May.

"Dear May, you do not know—you cannot tell," sighed Meredith. "I wanted yonder moon and it was above me. I have been very foolish; but no one guesses at my folly save my little cousin, who is best and dearest of all. You will be true to me, May? You will not marry some foreigner and leave us?"

"No chance, for I am wanted here. They cannot do without me," answered May, cheerfully. "Will you not come back and stay with us? You come so seldom, and they looked so sad and disappointed when you went away."

Meredith hesitated a moment, then, with decisive step and masterful resolution, returned with her to his grandfather's humble fireside.

CHAPTER XIX.

MENDELSSOHN'S WEDDING MARCH.

THE first time that May played the organ on a public occasion in Derwen Church was on Mr. Everton and Edith's wedding-day. It was the bride's fancy that she should do so. Accordingly she sat trembling in the organ loft while the ceremony was performed that united the two

friends who had first become acquainted through her innocent instrumentality. Her heart beat very quickly as she knelt upon the seat and looked between the curtains at the wedding party. She watched the children of the Derwen schools line the aisles with flowers in their hands, and the church gradually fill; the arrival of Mr. Everton and his friends; and, finally, Miss Edith, led by her father, and followed by her sisters as bridesmaids. She wished she had been among the young girls who cast flowers on the bride's path, and felt so excited as she saw her and Mr. Everton kneel before the Holy Table that she fancied her heart must burst. She listened to the solemn service with clasped hands and tearful eyes, wondering almost that anyone could be found to make such serious promises, but wondering still more that some should be found to break them.

The service was in no wise choral, therefore May was able to watch and listen. She would have been alone in the organ gallery but for little Davy, who was a watcher like herself, and awaiting the moment when he should be needed to blow the bellows for his friend May. How often they had rehearsed the little ceremonial together who shall say? Everyone else either had, or fancied they had, something to do with the actual wedding, and left her to play her part in it unaided. Meredith had so managed as to be engaged elsewhere, and so to avoid the ceremony. This was a great sorrow to her, though she knew its real source. It was very sad, she thought, that what made two people happy should make a third unhappy; but such, she had been told, was life; an April day—showers here, sunshine there. She thought she had never seen anyone look so good and sweet as Miss Edith, or so joyous as Mr. Everton. For a little moment she lamented that they would now be lost to her, but anon she rejoiced in their felicity.

"Now, Davy!" said May, just before the ceremony was over.

She left her post of observation, and seated herself

before the organ. The vicar's voice was audible, even to the last word, and no sooner was that word uttered than May struck the first chords of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March." It was an ordeal for her as great as the first performance of many a more ambitious artiste; but she had nerved her small fingers and fragile frame for this, her *début* as organist, and she played a triumphant *finale* to the service. All her friends were there to hear; even her grandfather was there in his accustomed seat, having come more for her sake than Edith's, and she divided the general attention with the bride; and the celebrated march was never more enthusiastically played, for it seemed to the youthful musician that she was not only expressing joy but gratitude.

And while she played the church gradually emptied, and the wedding party drove off amid the cheers and good wishes of the congregation. Only she, Davy, and her aged grandfather were left within the sacred building. She tried hard to suppress her tears when she realised that the church was empty, and those she loved gone. She had wished the bride and bridegroom good-bye, at their own request, the previous day, and had no desire to see them drive off from the church door; she had given them her little wedding present, in the shape of the small white figure, in valuable Swansea china, of a dancing child strewing flowers. This had belonged to her grandmother, and had been readily transferred to her when she expressed a modest wish that her friends might possess it to recall to them the small dancing-child they had befriended and taught. None of them knew how rare was the specimen, though all acknowledged its beauty. More than this, she had offered for them her heartfelt prayers to the Most High.

When the last chord of the glorious march was played, and she heard the shouts of the people outside, she roused herself to tell Davy to leave the organ and join the spectators. She herself crept quietly down to Evan's seat in the aisle.

"God bless thee, child! Thou hast played well, and stirred up my old blood, so that I thought to march myself," he said.

"Did I seem to tremble very much, great-grandfather?"

"Thou wast firm as a rock, and wilt make a prime organist; so everybody whispered to me as they passed me by. I am glad I let thee learn."

May was satisfied. This approval was more to her than would be that of the public—if, indeed, a congregation of friends and acquaintances could be called "the public." Still, she had her ovation. When Evan and she at last left the church together, the people who had been seeing the last of the wedding-party gathered round them.

"Well, you did play grand! Better than Jones, the schoolmaster," said one, patting May on the shoulder.

"There's proud you are now, Evan! 'Tis next to having a parson in one's family," remarked another.

"No wonder she can play for the choir; and she managing two rows of keys! Yet she is but a little one!" put in a third.

And so May was comforted for the loss of her friends.

Many were the festivities in honour of the wedding. The colliers had a dinner, the school children a tea. Uncle Laban was much occupied all day, and Meredith would be obliged to appear at the dinner; but Evan excused himself from sharing in the demonstrations upon the plea of age and infirmities, and he and May walked slowly—very slowly—home. They stood a moment to admire the pretty floral arch over the church gate, and May gathered up two roses from the path in remembrance of the day.

"Thou art thinking of thy pretty crown, child," said Evan.

"Oh, no, great-grandfather; I have quite forgotten it."

Peggy was standing at the door awaiting them when they reached home. There had been only room for one in the wagonette that had conveyed Evan to the church.

"'Twas lucky I did stop at home! Look you here, May," she exclaimed, as they went in.

A wonderful surprise awaited May. There, underneath the window, stood a small new harmonium. She stood looking at it for some time in speechless wonder.

"Dost think it is a corpse-candle, child?" laughed old Peggy. "Two men did bring him in a cart from the railway, but were not knowing who was sending him."

"It is Cousin Meredith," cried May, approaching the harmonium on tip-toe with a sort of awe.

She opened it, and a card with the word "May" thereon, fell out.

"Play you for me what you have been playing for Miss Edith. Then I shall feel as if I had been at the wedding too," cried Peggy, looking on, her arms akimbo, and laughing as heartily as she did when May herself first came to Derwen Fach.

May sat down with as much trepidation as at the organ previously, and once more played through Mendelssohn's "Wedding March." It set old Peggy fairly going, and she could no more help moving with the triumphant harmonies than she could help quavering with the glorious melody. She stood behind the performer swaying and singing, while Evan folded his hands over his stick and watched and listened.

She had also another admiring and astonished auditor in Hedfa. He planted himself by her side, and looked inquiringly from her to the instrument. At last he laid his paw on her arm, which called forth a "Down, Hedfa!" from Evan, which was instantly obeyed.

"He doesn't understand it, great-grandfather," remonstrated May.

"I'll warrant me Terps does," said Peggy, pointing to the becloaked and behatted Terpsichore, who sat on the window-sill observant, with wide-opened eyes.

There was not a happier trio in all Derwen that evening than May and her grandparents. She played and they all sang until the very birds must have heard them,

and it would have been impossible to remember the times that she repeated the words, "How kind of Cousin Meredith! how very, very kind!"

As days and months passed on not only that kitchen but the institute, the cottages, the church, and the mines resounded with music. Meredith knew that his gift would be welcome, for it would not only enable his cousin to practice at home herself, but to help others equally devoted to the divine art. It would also give Evan and Peggy the pleasure of listening to the practice without the fatigue of leaving their own fireside.

Such was the enthusiasm for music that children of all ages were taught to sing and compete for prizes at the national institutions called Eisteddfodau. May sometimes felt aggrieved that she had never attended one of these festivals, either as performer or auditor; while Leah's little daughter had actually won a prize for singing the Old Hundredth correctly at three years of age, held in her father's arms. Since the tonic sol-fa system had been introduced amongst the colliers these prizes for children under seven had been given. May scarcely thought the plan a wise one, remembering what had been her own experience of public performances; but she frequently heard how one child of four had cried because another of five had won the guerdon, and thought they might have both been better at home. Miss Richards now conducted her class on the tonic sol-fa system, and its members did credit both to it and her.

The approaching choral competition at the Crystal Palace served to give increased impetus to this inborn genius for music. Mr. Richards not only procured a trained master for his men, but gave them a bandmaster as well, so that the strike was literally swamped, for the time at least, in the overpowering tide of harmony. The choirmaster found both an apt scholar and indefatigable aid in May. It was he who had previously given her lessons on the organ, so that they were already friends, and he looked to her to assist in making the Derwen con-

tingent equal to the other members of the great South Wales choir.

While the institute was full to overflowing night after night with eager men and women, the mines also resounded with music, and Bach, Handel, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn echoed through the gloomy chambers of the underground township, as well as through the sunlit cottages, hills, and woods of the more romantic hamlets above.

Laban was rarely absent from the practice, and Meredith joined it whenever time permitted. But what he liked best was to sing and play with May at their own harmonium, their grandparents listening. He had grown much more humble since his first disappointment, and, although no one save May had even guessed at it, he was always fancying that everyone knew how that he had secretly entertained hopes of aspiring to the hand of his master's daughter. Of course Miss Richards still presided at the harmonium of the institute, though she frequently yielded her seat to May on one pretence and another; for she was well aware that May surpassed her as an accompanist. But she was also needed as leader of the *soprani*, and she became a person of so much consequence that had she been *prima donna* at some grand concert she could scarcely have been more in request.

"Thy head will be turned, child," said her grandfather. "I little thought when I saw thee first there was so much in it."

"Plenty o' wool, I'm thinking," laughed Peggy. "She'll be having no head at all if they are going on at this rate. Why, 'tis 'May!' here, 'May!' there. 'Where's May?' She's wanted at the church, she's wanted at the institute, she's wanted at Richards's, Derwen Fawr, and she's wanted at Morrison's, Derwen Fach! Ha! ha! a bit of a girl like that, with a head like a big sunflower."

"Oh, grandmother! indeed you are mistaken," urged May, quite abashed. "I will never go again if you dislike it."

"Go you, child; I am only joking. I am glad that they are liking you and your bit of a voice," replied Peggy, with a side wink at Evan.

As Christmas came on, May's responsibilities increased. The vicar as well as she was anxious that the service on Christmas Day should be as perfect as poor mortals could make it. He was an exception himself to the rule at Derwen, for he was not musical; still, he troubled May greatly by his anxiety about what he did not understand.

"I will do my very best, sir," she said, in reply to certain misgivings as to her capability of leading the singing on Christmas morning, when all were sure to sing their very loudest, which was, indeed, just what he liked. "Miss Richards, and Uncle Laban, and Cousin Meredith will all be in the choir, and will help me," she added, humbly.

The vicar need not have been afraid. When May took her seat she was quite prepared. Just above the organ was the word "Hallelujah," prettily lettered in holly berries, and surrounded by prickly leaves. Her heart rose higher still, and she longed to unite with the heavenly host in singing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to men." She did not think of herself, and no one in the church thought of her as her clear voice penetrated above the others in "Hark! the herald angels sing," and various joyous Christmas hymns. Hands and voice went in unison as she played and sang the praises of the Messiah.

And in the afternoon, when the anthem was sung, both choir and congregation joined, either in heart or voice, or both. Here and there perhaps a critic wondered to hear a village congregation sing, from Handel's *Messiah*, "Unto us a Child is born," but there was no astonishment elsewhere. Youthful organist and devotional people rejoiced in the music of the great master, and had studied it, and finally sang it to the glory of Him who inspired the composition, and to whom is all the praise.

CHAPTER XX.

BACK TO LONDON.

THE excitement throughout the mining districts of South Wales was intense when, in the beginning of July, 1873, the great Welsh choir started for London; and nowhere was it greater than at Derwen. As to May, her grandfather might now well fear lest her head should be actually turned. She had no rest that night, and was astir before the dawn. Back to London after twelve years' absence! What did that not mean? What might it not involve? Yet when the moment of departure came she could scarcely tear herself from the arms of her grandparents.

"Why, it's only a week, child. Look you at Terp! She's quite ashamed of you for being so silly," remonstrated Peggy.

"I must take her with me, just to show Mrs. Pope how well she looks as a Welshwoman," returned May, betwixt laughter and tears.

She did in effect remove Terpsichore from her post of observation on the window-sill, and put her in her pocket, saying merrily—

"She came, like me, a poor little ballet-girl, and we are both going back full-grown Taffies."

"God bless thee, child! May I be spared to see thee again," was Evan's solemn leave-taking; for he somehow fancied that she would not soon return.

Her face clouded at this, but grew radiant again when her grandmother appeared with her scarlet cloak.

"Take you this, child; that jacket's too thin. Miss Sophy was saying Welsh cloaks with hoods is all the fashion in London."

So May started from home with a little Welshwoman in her pocket, and a Welsh cloak across her arm. She

"Back to London."

was otherwise very simply dressed in a neat gown and jacket of pale grey alpaca, and a white straw bonnet. No flounces or furbelows would Evan allow her to wear; but few prettier girls could be seen. A good sized hand-bag contained her modest wardrobe, and as she tripped down the garden she looked very much like a fairy queen. Turning to look back she saw her grandparents, Mally, Hedfa, and the cat watching at the door. She kissed her hand to them and hurried into the wood, through which she ran quickly until she reached the ravine, and finally Tygwyn. Here Uncle Laban was awaiting her, and there was a great outcry of Leah's children, while poor Leah and her mother looked somewhat melancholy at being left behind.

"Take care of your uncle, May. You do know London and he do not," said 'Lizbeth, brushing Laban's coat for the hundreth time.

"If only Twm was going," sighed Leah.

"Perhaps he will be there, Cousin Leah, for he dearly loved music," suggested May, wondering if such a thing were possible.

The choir met at Derwen Station, and very crowded it was, for everybody was there to see them off. May had scarcely time to greet Meredith, and remark that Mr. Richards and all his family were there, before she found herself in the train, seated between her uncle and cousin. Rachel and her husband and little Davy were of the party also; indeed, May recognised friends turn where she would—a very different scene from the one that greeted her when she came, a forlorn child, to Derwen Station. She was thinking of this when she was startled by a mighty shout, as the train steamed off. It came from the spectators on the platform, who were cheering their own special contingent of native choristers. It was still quite early, and the long July day was all before them.

But it was not a minute too long for all they had to do. Still, it passed to May's excited mind like an arrow through the air, and no sooner was one scene begun than

another pressed upon it. She thought the train was already full, but as it stopped at the various stations its passengers multiplied, and they were mostly either singers or patriotic Welsh going all the way to London to hear their country people sing. Passing through the lovely Vale of Neath, and on through Glamorganshire, they were heartily cheered at every station until, arriving at Cardiff, the choir was completed by the addition of one hundred and twenty members from the Rhondda Valleys. Then they proceeded on their way, five hundred strong, followed by hurrahs and fervent good wishes for their success.

May sat almost silent amid a babel of tongues—the one golden-crested wren amid a rookery—until, at about two o'clock, they reached the ancient city of Bristol. It must be borne in mind that she was only a unit among the five hundred, therefore she merely went and sang with the rest —for at Bristol they were all fêted by friends and strangers. But she had Meredith all to herself, who cared for her and watched over her like a true-hearted brother, and who shielded her from observation when people remarked upon her looks or gazed at her fair face and labyrinth of hair.

A grand luncheon was prepared for them at the Colston Hall, after which two concerts were arranged. But we must not linger over these, inasmuch as we should but repeat ourselves when in London. Suffice it here to say that the choir rehearsed at Bristol what they were to perform in London, and that May felt there, as she did afterwards, that the responsibility was on her shoulders, and sang just as if she were sole performer. If the applause were just and the subsequent compliments deserved, she thought that they must indeed have done well. And so they did. All Bristol thronged to hear them, and as there were many Welsh inhabitants the enthusiasm was great. May would never feel quite alone, for in the choir she sat beside Rachel, and at all other times she was with Meredith. She had one great desire; and that was to speak to Caradoc, the leader of the choir.

He was, himself, a man of the people, once a blacksmith, she had heard; but if she had imagined Uncle Laban clever in his way, as conductor, how remarkable was this man!

"If I could only touch him!" she said to Meredith. "He seems all music."

"So we are all just at present, I think," laughed Meredith. "But father knows him, and I daresay he will introduce you."

"Introduce me!" repeated May, to whom the idea of a presentation to so remarkable a person was quite appalling.

Yet that very evening the suggestion was carried out. It was not Uncle Laban, but her organ master, who brought Caradoc up to her, and said that she was the young organist of whom he had been speaking, and whose voice Caradoc had been remarking upon.

"How could he hear my voice among so many?" she whispered, timidly.

"It is clear and penetrating, and you have been used to lead," was the reply.

She had the happiness of shaking hands with Caradoc, which caused Rachel to express her wonder that she should be noticed before everybody else. But there was no time for anything more. A luncheon, a tea, and two concerts filled up the afternoon and evening of that eventful day, and not only May but the other members of the choir were ready for bed when all was over. A committee, of which Mr. Richards was a member, had made all necessary arrangements for them, and had they been a royal family instead of an assembly of miners, they could not have been better housed and fed. The loyal city of Bristol knows how to welcome and appreciate excellence in whatever garb it appear. Somebody may question this assertion by a "What of Chatterton, 'the marvellous boy'?" But let him rest for the present.

The following morning was Wednesday, and they were once more early at the station. May was kindly greeted

by Mrs. Richards and her daughters, who had been auditors at both concerts.

"I am sure I heard your voice, May," said Miss Richards. "Did not you, Mr. Morrison?"

I am afraid I was thinking more of the tenors than the sopranos, Miss Richards," replied Meredith.

May had never heard her cousin called "Mr. Morrison," and she looked up at him quite appalled. But he took it as if he were used to it; for elsewhere he had been so styled as a matter of course; while at Derwen he was "Morrison, Manager."

"I hope they are not offended with him, and don't know how much he liked Miss Edith," thought May. But excitement soon drove all speculations out of her head.

The journey to London seemed over in no time, and they were at Paddington soon after one o'clock. May stood on the platform in a sort of dream. A vision of a little girl, a clergyman, and the master of a union floated before her memory, and she recalled the moment when she was put into the train alone, with a ticket round her neck.

"Then I had only Terpsichore," she thought, laying her hand instinctively on her pocket. "Now," looking about her, "I have five hundred friends."

"Here she is! here she is!" sounded near, and a hand was laid on her shoulder.

It was Mr. Everton.

"Oh! dear sir, I am so glad!" she cried, putting both her hands in his.

"And glad to see me, too, I hope, May?" said another voice.

"Miss Edith! dear Miss Edith!" she added, turning round to receive an affectionate kiss from Mrs. Everton.

"We have come to meet mamma, and see you and all the dear old friends," said Edith, who looked as bright and happy as ever. "You must come and spend a long day with us at Norwood, when the competition is over.

I feel as if I were in Wales again amidst all these dear fellow-countrymen and women."

"I wish you had never left us," sighed May.

"Treason, May, treason; but we must not keep you," broke in Mr. Everton, "the procession is forming."

It was Uncle Laban, not Meredith, who came in search of May, and who shook hands heartily with Mr. and Mrs. Everton. She was, however, soon transferred to Meredith, who said, eagerly, "You have seen her? How does she look?"

Before she could answer the brass band struck up the "March of the Men of Harlech," and the Welsh choir marched in unison out of the station and into the streets. Even in London people stopped to look and listen, for enthusiasm is catching, and they were enthusiastic.

As in Bristol so in London. Every possible arrangement was made for the comfort and pleasure of the choir by a select committee of interested compatriots. They had nothing to do but to sing, play, eat, drink, and see sights. Two-thirds of them had probably never been in London before, amongst whom were Laban and Rachel; Meredith had been more than once on business for Mr. Richards. May was pleased to see that Uncle Laban had taken little Davy under his special charge, and that they were walking behind her and her cousin.

"Davy is quite a different boy since he has been with you, Cousin Meredith," remarked May, as she caught the lad's animated glance.

"I am glad you think so, May. But I am half afraid music makes him idle. What a voice he has for such a little body! How you dance along, dear!"

"Do I? I feel as if my soul had wings, Cousin Meredith. I am like Davy. Music makes me wild."

"What will you be to-night then, Cousin May?"

"The "to-night" thus alluded to was a concert given by Miss Edith Wynne. No sooner had the choir marched to their place of destination, rested awhile, partaken of refreshments, and seen something of London, than most

of its members were marshalled to St. George's Hall. The Welsh motto, "Union is Strength," is certainly the stronghold of the Principality, for they cling to one another, meet where they will. Edith Wynne, the sweet ballad singer, was a Welshwoman, and the Cymric countenances turned naturally towards her, as hers towards them.

May was very happy that evening, for she had nothing to do but listen. She was generally herself a performer, in a very different sphere, certainly, but yet a performer. Although she still remembered the music of the pantomimes, she had never before attended a genuine concert, and it seemed to her an elysium. All the fatigue and excitement of the previous thirty-six hours were forgotten in the happiness of hearing good music and singing, and she began to wish that she, like Edith Wynne, might become a Welsh nightingale transported to English skies.

"But I should not have the courage to sing or act in public now," she said to Meredith.

"Yet that is what Mrs. Richards has set her heart upon," he replied.

A vision of her grandparents passed before her, just as she had seen them last. She smiled as she thought of them, and, for the moment, longed to be with them.

"What if great-grandfather were to have a stroke, or if either of them were to die while I am away!" she thought. "I wish I had never left them."

When the concert was over, Mrs. and Miss Richards appeared before May, accompanied by a strange gentleman.

"This is our little Eos of whom I was speaking to you," said Mrs. Richards to the stranger.

"I will arrange a time to try her voice," he replied, looking at her with interest; then adding aside to Mrs. Richards, "Her appearance is in her favour, and that is half way to success."

Meredith heard this, if May did not, and was strengthened in his opinion that the friends of his cousin were

determined that her musical gifts should not be lost to the world.

"You would not mind singing to this gentleman when you come down to Norwood, May?" said Mrs. Richards in Welsh, while May was half suffocated by the pressure of the departing crowd.

"No, ma'am, but——" replied May, and the rest of her sentence was not heard.

But for Meredith she would have been separated from her companions by this little delay. He piloted her through the throng until they joined the choir, and all once more filed down lamp-lighted Regent-street into the intricate maze of Oxford-circus.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MUSICAL TOURNAMENT.

A FLOURISH of trumpets heralded the appearance of the Welsh choir in the orchestra of the Crystal Palace—a flourish of trumpets and cheers long and loud. As they took their places and turned their bronzed faces to an audience of twelve thousand people, it is no wonder that the cheers were prolonged. That five hundred Welsh miners should come all the way from the Principality to do battle with the musical world, if that world so chose, was matter of general interest. When Caradoc, the ex-blacksmith as they called him, appeared, bâton in hand, it seemed as if the noise that greeted him must have shivered the glass-roof above, and when he took his seat in front of his choir, waved his wand, and so moved them to stand, the very foundations must have shaken.

May sat among the *soprani*, by the side of Rachel, conspicuous for her fairness and sunny hair. Tears were in

her eyes, and her heart throbbed as if it must burst as the uproar subsided and she fixed her eyes on the leader. But emotion soon ceased when, at a stroke of the bâton, the competition began. The pieces selected were not only classical, but difficult of execution. They were—Bach's motett, "I wrestle and pray;" Beethoven's "Hallelujah chorus," from *The Mount of Olives;* Mendelssohn's "See what love hath the Father," from *St. Paul;* and "Come with torches," from *The Walpurgis Night,* also by Mendelssohn.

It is sufficient to say here that all these fine works were reproduced with an ease and precision that astonished and delighted the auditors, and that the applause which succeeded each was vociferous and unanimous. But the two pieces that suited best the fiery natures of the musical miners were the "Hallelujah Chorus" and the "Come with torches." The latter especially was given with such energy and enthusiasm that the effect was almost electrical. The *soprani* particularly distinguished themselves, and as their ringing voices pierced through the arched palace, it seemed as if a chorus of birds was penetrating to the sky beyond. As to May, she was carried away by the music, and stood as if she were really a Druidical rather than a Christian maiden. Someone had told her the story of the "Walpurgis Nacht," and had said that it was especially hers, because it was on the first of May that the witches met on the Harz mountains on that particular night to scare away the Christians, and that Goethe and Mendelssohn between them had written the piece in honour of the Druids. The Welsh were as much the descendants of the Druids as the Germans, and she was their May Queen; so, said her patriotic informant, the composition was especially hers. Be that as it may, she sang with a will, and looked almost inspired. She had taken off her bonnet, as others had done, and as she stood pouring forth the weird, wonderful, descriptive music, she might have been a fair Scandinavian singer rather than a Cymric one. This fact caused remarks to be made upon her by various members of the audience.

Still, she was only one in a great whole, and, where all did well and each was eager as she for the success of the choir, she merely played her part; but she thought she must have sunk through the orchestra when the final plaudits came. Not only were *bravas* shouted, but hats and handkerchiefs waved, until the fairy palace of glass resounded with irrepressible applause. Only the judges were immovable, as in duty bound.

Surely the honest toilers underground were gratified, and they looked so, as, with smiling faces and exultant hearts, they climbed up to the Handel orchestra to make room for other competitors. The lesser choirs had tried first, but efforts had been made north and south by Mr. Willert Beale, originator of the competition, to induce choirs from afar to run the gauntlet with the sturdy Welshmen; but none had cared to enter the lists save Mr. Proudman, with his tonic sol-fa choir, three hundred strong. He was said to be an ex-saddler, as Caradoc was an ex-blacksmith, and the members of his choir were of a class in London no wise superior to the Welsh miners. But how different their appearance! Pale, instead of bronzed faces, lined the orchestra, and striking was the contrast between the denizens of London and Wales. Still, the London choir was excellent, and in some points of finish superior to the Welsh, and they gained much and deserved applause; but chiefly from the Welsh portion of the audience, the English having caught for once the Celtic enthusiasm, and exhausted themselves in doing honour to the Principality.

Critics were doubtful as to the decision of the judges, who had been sitting on the dais in front of the orchestra, and were the well-known composers and musicians, Sir Julius Benedict, Mr. Barnby, and Sir John Goss, who entered into rest only last year.

"The English have done best! We shall lose the challenge cup!" whispered May to Rachel.

She had listened with breathless attention to the rival choir, and, by an intuitive appreciation of what was excellent, had discovered much in them that she felt or fancied

the Welsh lacked, and with spontaneous generosity had silently awarded them the palm.

Indeed, she had much sympathy with "the palefaces," remembering her own childhood. But her divided affections were soon reunited when she heard another mighty shout, and learnt that the judges had decided in favour of the Welsh choir—that the challenge cup was theirs, and they were "the champion singers."

It was long before the hubbub, noise, enthusiasm—call it what you will—subsided.

"I am so sorry for them; they deserve the prize as much as we do," said May, her heart much troubled at sight of the white, quiet Londoners.

She was somewhat consoled, however, when she learnt that a fifty-guinea harmonium was awarded to them as a "consolation prize," while, in addition to the challenge cup, the Welsh choir were to receive a purse of one hundred guineas.

"I think it is better to lose than win. I should not like to compete again," said May to Uncle Laban and Meredith, as they walked on either side of her through the wonderful mazes of the Crystal Palace, when the choir were on their way to luncheon in jubilant procession.

"Is your name Madeline Goldworthy?" suddenly exclaimed someone in the crowd.

The trio saw a gentleman making his way towards them through the procession that immediately preceded them. They could not pause, so he joined them and walked abreast with them.

"That is her name," said Meredith, making way for him between himself and May, who looked with wondering curiosity at the stranger, but did not recognise him.

"I was sure it was the same: there could not be two heads of hair precisely like that—every hair a separate golden thread, untameable by art. Do you remember sitting for your portrait about twelve years ago? You stood with your arms over your head, a little, dancing, airy, golden-headed child."

"I do! I do! Oh, sir, how did you know it."

"I am the artist, James Minister. Do you remember?"

"Yes, you were very kind to us—my poor mother and me. That is all I recollect, except my attitude, and that you gave me sweets. And I remember you a little."

Thus answered May, returning the artist's wondering gaze. She had been five years old when that picture was taken—she was now sixteen; yet his features gradually returned to her memory as they had appeared to her long ago when, pencil in hand, he sketched her portrait.

"I have much to say to you—much to tell you," he said, hurriedly. "I was among the audience, and recognised you in the orchestra, and am thankful to have effected this meeting. When can you arrange a private interview with me?"

"I do not know, sir," she replied, glancing from her uncle to Meredith.

"Would you bring Miss Goldworthy to me to-morrow? I know the choir will be occupied to-day," he asked, looking at Meredith. "I have much to communicate. It is important."

"My father?" breathed May, with eager eyes.

"Yes, I can speak to you of him; but not now—not here," he replied. "I live in London, and have an appointment this evening, or I would remain and see you again."

"There would be no time," said Meredith, decidedly. "To-morrow I shall be happy to accompany her to whatever place you may appoint. I am her cousin."

Mr. Minister gave Meredith his card, saying—

"In the afternoon. At three o'clock, if that will suit you."

"My father! Is he alive?" cried May. But the sudden halt of the procession separated her from the artist, and she saw him no more that day.

There was no time either for reflection or speculation. With her heart full of doubting, anxious expectation, May was borne amongst the choir to a munificent collation prepared for them. There, under a glass roof, surrounded by

beautiful gardens, sparkling fountains, statues, terraces, lawns, and gay crowds, the Welsh choir was feasted. To May it would have been fairyland but for the late strange encounter. One thought was in her heart—one desire filled her soul: her father! Should she see him again? Was he yet alive?

The charms of music, the pleasure of success, the wonders of the Palace, the watchful care of friends—all were forgotten in this one great, craving longing to hear of him she had well nigh forgotten, but who was still her father.

"It is not long to wait, dear May; only till to-morrow," pleaded Meredith, who was filling her plate with good cheer.

"To-morrow! It seems as if it would never come," returned May, with gleaming eyes.

And in truth, despite continued excitement, it did seem as if that day would never end. Still, she was obliged to forget herself at seven o'clock, when the presentation of the prizes took place. She felt as one in a dream when she found herself in the opera room of the Palace, and she imagined herself once more on the boards of the stage which she faced, for the choir occupied the centre of the theatre.

The crowds that filled every seat from pit to galleries, the cheers that greeted the appearance of kind and interested friends, oppressed her, and she almost longed to be back at Derwen. What if she should be expected to face such crowds again?

But the sound of the familiar Welsh tongue reassured her, and she roused herself to listen to the speeches, and join in the melodies which interspersed them. The platform—indeed the theatre itself—was full of Welsh, and some of the speeches were in that language, made by members of Parliament, musicians, and others. And the choir sang the songs she loved and knew by heart, and were again applauded to the echo, until, for the moment, she forgot to-morrow in to-day.

The memorial cup was there. She knew that it was worth one thousand pounds. It was surmounted by a Welsh harp, and emblazoned with the armorial bearings of Wales. She saw a lady come forward and present it to Caradoc amidst vociferous cheers; and she learnt that the lady was the wife of Mr. Brinley Richards, the composer, himself a patriotic Welshman, and chief of the committee. Much more she heard and saw, until her head seemed in a whirl between excitement and expectation; but perhaps what pleased her best was Caradoc's speech in Welsh, when he acknowledged the presentation on behalf of the choir of which she was a member. Still, she thought it must be very embarrassing to stand up and compliment one another, as the gentlemen did upon the platform.

However, it all came to an end at last, and May again found herself under Meredith's protecting ægis. Both he and Uncle Laban were loud in their praises of the speeches, as they had been in their cheers of the speakers. Indeed, the surrounding choristers were equally gratified, and May wondered when the hearty encomiums would cease.

Her wonder was interrupted by the appearance of Mr. and Mrs. Everton, who were forcing heir way through the mass of people towards her. She had observed Mr. and Mrs. Richards and their daughters on the platform; indeed, Mr. Richards had been one of the speakers.

"Here we are at last," said Mrs. Everton, breathlessly; and in another moment she was shaking hands, not only with May, but with her other old Derwen friends.

Meredith drew back. His face was flushed, his manner awkward. But Mrs. Everton, understanding nothing, offered her hand, and said she was indeed glad to see him again. He touched it nervously, and withdrew behind other of the choristers.

May meanwhile was talking to Mr. Everton.

"Mr. Minister, the painter who took my likeness—he knows about my father. Oh, dear sir, will you pray that

he may be alive, and that I may see him again?" she was saying.

"You will come to us on Saturday after the concert, and stay over Sunday, and then we shall hear the result of your interview," said Mr. Everton. "I, too, will call on the artist."

May beckoned Meredith forward, who gave the address. He had quite recovered from his temporary discomposure, and spoke frankly and naturally to Mr. Everton.

"I will take Cousin May there to-morrow, sir," he said. "Perhaps, as you knew her mother, you would meet us? You might be able to give information that I cannot."

And so it was settled.

But Uncle Laban drew Mr. Everton aside, and spoke to him seriously concerning May, while Mrs. Everton came to her.

"I saw Mrs. Richards this morning, sir," he said. "She told me that the child's voice had been noticed and praised, and that she believed the committee and others would apprentice her to some place in London where she could be taught to sing."

"The Royal Academy of Music," supplied Mr. Everton.

"Yes, sir. But I am thinking the loss of her would be the death of my parents, who love her dearly."

"If her father should be living, that would perhaps change the whole course of her life," suggested Mr. Everton. "But I quite agree with you; she is best at Derwen, where she is sheltered and happy. It is too often a mistake to remove young girls from their friends, and to place them in the midst of strangers and temptations, though Mrs. Everton and I would see to May. But let us wait quietly over to-morrow."

"Mrs. Richards has settled to have her voice tried to-morrow morning, sir," continued Laban.

"There will be no harm done; it will be only an opinion," remarked Mr. Everton. "The ladies are resolute, and she thinks May, with her beauty and her gifts, is lost at Derwen Fach."

"Do not be afraid, Uncle Laban," here broke in a low, trembling voice. "I could never leave them while they want me."

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO ORDEALS.

THE following morning Mrs. and Miss Richards took May to Willis's Rooms, in Hanover Square, where they had appointed to meet a celebrated musician who was to try her voice. She was not nervous in singing, naturally, but the rapid events of the previous day, and the prospect of meeting Mr. Minister and hearing of her father, made her nervous. She trembled, therefore, as she followed her kind patronesses into a large and lofty room, where a few gentlemen and ladies were seated. These were members of the Welsh Choir Committee, who were friends of Mrs. Richards, and had been interested by her in May's voice and history. Mrs. Richards introduced her to them, and they were all, evidently, surprised at her appearance. They had expected a country damsel; they saw a delicate, refined-looking girl, who, though plainly dressed, looked a lady. She replied to their various questions shyly, but without awkwardness, and the sweetness of her voice in speaking gave earnest of what it would be in song. All were favourably impressed, and as she followed her friends to the orchestra at one end of the room, many complimentary remarks were made. Some time elapsed before the great man came, during which Mrs. and Miss Richards encouraged May.

"You need not be afraid, for your small audience are all friends," said the latter.

"I do not think I am afraid, ma'am, but I do not think great-grandfather would like it," she replied.

"He could have no objection to your being heard, now the opportunity offers. He is old, May, and when he is gone you will be obliged to support yourself. With your voice you may not only do so respectably, but make a fortune to help your poorer relations."

Tears were in May's eyes, for she could never bear to hear of the probable end of her beloved grandfather's life. Mrs. Richards looked upon it with matured mind, as an event that must soon take place, and believed that May's other friends would be thankful that she should be provided for, instead of being burdensome to them. She, like numberless other country ladies, felt sure that her *protégée* had only to come to London, appear, and succeed. She little knew what was the competition, the anxiety, the strain, the years of preparatory labour, and continuous exertion when actual preparation ceases; the heart-burnings, the fluctuations, the utter weariness of a public career.

To May's great joy Caradoc came with the expected *maestro*. He shook hands with her warmly, and astonished her by saying that she had led the *soprani* splendidly the day before.

"Just sing to this gentleman as you sang then, and you need not fear the result," he added.

"I will try, sir," she replied, simply.

She was always yielding and obedient, and thus forgot herself. She accordingly sang as commanded, and although her young heart beat with an eager anxiety concerning what to her was more important far than her voice, she sang well. The master tried her in many ways, and considering her limited musical education she acquitted herself respectably in all.

"It is a pure and beautiful voice, and deserves to be cultivated," he said, when he rose from the piano and laid his hand kindly on her shoulder. "Surely you are not nervous?" he added, seeing the moist eyes.

He then held a consultation with Mrs. Richards, during which that lady learnt what a musical education

involved. In the first place, a considerable sum of money for the support and training of the pupil until she should be considered ready to make her *début;* in the second, the capabilities of the artiste to make and sustain a reputation that should repay the outlay.

"It seems a pity that such genius should be lost," said Mrs. Richards, thoughtfully.

"So many supposed geniuses turn out failures," replied the master, shrugging his shoulders. "But she certainly promises fair." Then going towards May he added, "Are you bent on a public career?"

"Oh no, sir. But Mrs. Richards has been so good to me, and she wishes it. I could do as she thinks best when——" May paused, for the "When my grandparents are dead" would not come.

And so May's first ordeal ended for the present. She was not permitted to hear the approving comments of her audience, or what passed between the English and the Welsh conductors; she was only thankful that it was finished, and that her friends expressed themselves satisfied with what she had done.

"When we return to Wales we will think it over," said Mrs. Richards.

"If only they would send little Davy instead of me," ejaculated May.

Her second ordeal was yet to come. Mrs. Richards took her to a pastrycook's for luncheon, then drove her to the lodging where she and some other members of the choir were located. Meredith was waiting for her, and it was already past two o'clock. The address given by Mr. Minister was at Brompton, and, fearing to be late, Meredith called a cab, rather than risk a journey by omnibus. A shilling more or less was not now of so much consequence to him as it had been a few years before. Uncle Laban came in just in time to accompany them; for, having known May's mother and seen her father, it was deemed wise that he should be of the party. Not that anyone, save May herself, entertained a hope

of hearing that her father was alive. Mrs. and Miss Richards waited to see them off, then went in search of other amusements, for they were among the kind friends who had undertaken to pioneer parties of their choir to see the London sights.

It was a little after the appointed hour when the cab pulled up at the artist's dwelling. This was a small, suburban villa, situated in a tiny garden, where bright flowers and sheltering acacias delighted the heart of May. Mr. Minister was evidently expecting them, for he hastened down the gravel-path to meet them, and took them at once into a small room, the walls of which were covered with pictures. Mr. Everton was already there.

"Will you remain here?" he said, hastily, to Laban and Meredith, "and will you come with me?" he added, to May.

She followed him through a red baize door in one corner of the room that communicated with another room which was a studio, where easels, sketches, brushes, and palettes bespoke the abode of the artist, as did also the glazed roof and other accessories.

"Here she is!" exclaimed Mr. Minister, cheerfully.

Before she was even conscious of the presence of a third person, she found herself clasped in the arms of someone whom she felt must be her father.

"My child! my child! It surely cannot be! It cannot be!" were the words that greeted her as soon as speech was possible.

She could neither speak nor breathe for that long, straining, passionate embrace.

When at last the arms were loosened, and she stood a moment face to face with him who had thus held her, a torrent of tears poured from her eyes and blinded her vision. The eyes that looked on her were also dim with tears, and once more the words came, "My child! my little Madeline! it cannot, cannot be," and the yearning father-heart again impelled the arms to open and enclose the long-lost daughter.

Speech is slow to come at such a time. Feeling overpowers it. To the pair who thus met it seemed almost lost. Instinctively they accepted one another, and sobbed out their uncontrollable emotion in each other's arms. The artist had left the room and rejoined the friends in the adjoining apartment, so that they were alone together, parent and child, who had been lost to one another for twelve long years.

It was May who first recovered some portion of calmness, and who, withdrawing slowly from the long embrace, said, hesitatingly—

"I do not yet understand. Are you really my own dear father?"

A pale, haggard, attenuated, grey-haired man stood before her, in whom appeared no single trace of him she remembered. He had been young, bright, handsome to her childish imagination, and had been so impressed on her memory.

"If you are Madeline Goldworthy, I am your father," he replied, sinking into an easy chair, covering his face with his hands, and again giving way to uncontrollable sobs.

May knelt down by the chair, and laid her hand on his arm. Then she said very gently—

"Oh! dear sir! dear father! we should rejoice, not weep, that God has been so good as to restore us to one another."

The words took instant effect. He removed his hands from before his face, and smiled upon her. It was a strange, weary smile, that almost alarmed May. His eyes were so unnaturally brilliant; his cheeks so supernaturally hollow, that he looked to her scarcely human. He clasped his thin hands, uplifted his eyes, murmured a few inarticulate words of thanksgiving, then laid the hands on her shining head.

"I recognise thee by this tangled hair, my love. How proud we were of its golden threads! I have been seeking thee ever since I found my reason, but seeking thee in vain. Where hast thou been?"

There was something in the look and manner of the questioner that caused May, instinctively, to reply cautiously—

"At Derwen, dear father, where everyone is good to me."

"Derwen!" he repeated, passing his hand over his brow. "Derwen! Ha! It was there your sweet mother lived when I married her. I dared not return there without her. Though, indeed, it was not my fault that I lost you both. Do you remember her?"

"Quite well, dear sir. I was six years old when the Lord took her to Himself."

A momentary silence succeeded these words, during which May's fair face was turned upwards towards her father's. She still knelt, and one of his hands remained on her head, while the other rested on the loose morning robe in which he was dressed. Perhaps this many-coloured attire, added to his half-wild appearance, alarmed May, for her eyes sank beneath his troubled gaze. But she summoned back her courage when he said, quietly—

"Tell me something of your mother. Was she—was she destitute—when—when, as you say, 'the Lord took her to Himself'?"

"Oh, no! we had kind friends. Mr. Everton, who is in the next room; Mrs. Pope, and others. I think she was happy, and I remember that she sent her love to you when you came back."

"She believed in me? She thought I should return?"

"I forget that; but I am sure she loved you very dearly, and we always prayed for you."

"Ah! it is supremely sad, my child. When I left you to travel abroad in search of work and experience I was assured of payment by my patron. I was to return in less than a year. I sent your sweet mother, my sainted Mary, all I earned. I was getting on. Suddenly I had fever—I forget where. They tell me that I lost my reason; but I know not what befel for a long, long time. I lost everything I had—sketches, papers, all! I hear people were

kind to me, but I know not who. I was in an Italian hospital, a stranger to all; there they put me into some sort of pauper place, I know not what. At last I got better, and the English consul sent me back to England. I had just money enough left to find my way back to the lodgings where I had left you and your sweet mother. You were no longer there. They directed me to some other place, whither they believed you had gone. The people had left. Some of the neighbours remembered a golden-haired little girl, whose mother had died, and was buried by the parish. Ah! my child! But none of them knew what had become of her. This brought on a relapse, and I had a fresh attack of fever. Again I know not what happened for some months. I was in the fever hospital, and all was a blank. But I got better, though they tell me I am always in a precarious state, body and mind. But I fell in with the little sketch Minister made of you, and recognised my Madeline. I sought him and he told me all he knew of you, which was not much; but it gave me comfort. He took compassion on me, and has been my guardian angel ever since I lived with him. I work with him, and he is to me as a brother. I am continually seeking you, but he it is who has found you. What attracted him in the child drew his attention in the sweet young singer, and he has brought you back to me. My love! My darling! My Madeline!"

While her father told his broken tale, May felt a sort of terror creep over her. Looking at him she could scarcely believe that he was her father. Listening, she shuddered to think of what he had gone through, and what might still be before him. Had she found him to lose him again? For it seemed to her that he could not have long to live.

"You will stay with me, my child?" he said suddenly. "I shall now have some one to work for. An object in life. They say I have genius. For your sake I will verify their words. Come here."

He rose and led May to an easel on which was a half-finished landscape. Even she saw how beautiful it was,

though she had no experience of art. "I will complete it: consecrate it to you," he added, stooping to kiss her. "It will make a home for us twain."

May did not venture to reply. She stood motionless before the picture; her father's arm round her waist. The tenderest filial feelings sprang to her breast, and she longed to devote herself to the poor, sorrow-stricken, melancholy man, who had been so long separated from her by no fault of his own. But instantaneously there arose before her mind's eye a vision of her grandparents, of her dear home, of all she loved best. She turned her eyes from the picture to her father, and almost without knowing what she uttered, breathed the words, "What would they do without me?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

MAY'S TEA PARTY.

While the interview between May and her father was taking place, Mr. Minister was recounting to his three guests what he knew of Mr. Goldworthy. He had not been personally acquainted with him when he painted May's picture, but knew of him only as a fellow-artist who had gone abroad to study. He had, himself, also left England soon after his casual acquaintance with May and her mother, and had thus lost sight of them. He had met Mr. Goldworthy casually after he left the fever hospital, and had been struck by his name and appearance. He introduced himself to him as having, he believed, painted a picture of his little girl, which had done much towards laying the foundation of his reputation. Poor Goldworthy caught at the hope this information held out, and asked for particulars. He

learnt little or nothing more than he already knew, but he obtained from Minister the name of the manager who had engaged his child for the pantomimes. He sought him, but only to ascertain that the little May Queen had suddenly disappeared, much to his personal inconvenience and annoyance. He returned to Mr. Minister in a state of great excitement. Indeed, that gentleman believed him half-crazed from the first. Nevertheless, he sought to aid him. He was a younger man than Goldworthy, and had met with success. He heartily pitied his unfortunate brother artist, and tried by sympathy and more substantial assistance to soothe his sorrows and encourage him to begin life afresh. But the loss of wife and child, added to his previous and subsequent severe illnesses, deprived him of energy, and he seemed incapable of any exertion. Still, he had undoubted genius, and Minister knew that if he could only be prevailed upon to resume art as a profession, and follow it with interest, his talents must be publicly acknowledged. But the wifeless, childless man could only be induced to paint what are prosaically called "pot-boilers," or such rapid sketches as picture-dealers love to buy, and which bring to the artist just money enough to supply his daily needs—in other words, to "keep the pot boiling." Goldworthy neither sought nor cared for fame. He could have wearied his very soul for those he loved; but for himself alone he cared not. However, Minister conceived a strong attachment for him, bred, doubtless, from his own kind heart; for we instinctively love those whom we seek to benefit. He instilled hope into the downcast man by assuring him that he must discover his child, since her remarkable hair alone would suffice to identify her. He had seen no other golden crown like hers, and he felt sure he should find her yet.

By degrees it came to pass that Goldworthy consented to share his kind friend's abode, and they had lived three years together. Minister had thus not only to cultivate his own powers, but to spur on his yet more gifted

companion to exertion. He succeeded in nerving him up to spasmodic efforts which, he affirmed, produced more effect than his own consecutive work; but he never induced him to paint a finished picture for exhibition. His mental powers were as uncertain as his physical, and his fear had been that they might give way altogether; but, he said, ecstatically—

"Now that he has found his daughter—and so sweet a daughter!—all will be well. We shall have his pictures in the Academy, and he will yet be honoured among his fellow men."

"And it will be your doing, sir. The honour will be yours, the glory God's," exclaimed Uncle Laban, holding out his hand, which the artist took.

Mr. Everton and Meredith also showed their appreciation of the loving kindness of Minister by words and looks, but he assured them that he should be more than repaid by the reunion of parent and child, and the restoration to the world of a long-concealed genius.

They talked on and on, awaiting the conclusion of the interview in the other room. They discussed May's grandparents and her relations with them, the desire of Mrs. Richards that she should appear in public, and all her previous history. Minister's one idea was, that she must at once take up her abode with her father; Laban's, that no one could fill her place at Derwen; Meredith's, that if she were to be taken from them, a second star would set from the horizon of his life.

While they were thus conversing, the red baize door slowly opened, and May and her father came in hand-in-hand. She was, indeed, leading him, for he was nervous at encountering strangers, and trembled as he approached those who were awaiting him. All but Minister started at the haggard vision that appeared with the sunny child-woman, but May immediately reassured them.

"Here is my dear papa, Uncle Laban. He remembers you and how you loved my dear mamma," she said, using the words familiar to her in infancy.

She drew her father forward, who seemed to hang back, and Laban hastened to meet him, and to take and press the hand which May held, half imploringly, towards him.

"Thank God, we have found you, sir," he said, "and that it was by no fault of yours that our poor Mary and the child were left alone."

"My fault was that I took her from you and her peaceful home," sobbed Goldworthy. "And now shall I do the same, and ruin her child's happiness?"

"This is Cousin Meredith, who is so good to me; and this is Mr. Everton, who—who—wrote to great grandfather, and sent me into Wales," broke in May, again taking the hand which Laban had relinquished, and leading her father, still reluctant, towards her other friends.

"You have all befriended them. Thank you, God bless you," he said, sank into a chair, and burst into tears.

Filial feelings had already sprung into May's soul, and she laid her hand gently on her father's shoulder. The bystanders looked at one another in surprise as they remarked the half-protecting, half-tender gesture, and the artist whispered to Meredith, "My task is done," and Meredith silently reflected that May's had, indeed, begun.

Her father recovered gradually from his emotion, and the little party sobered down into something more like conversation than the broken talk that had hitherto passed amongst them. May was thus enabled furtively to consider her newly-found parent and his friend. She thought that everyone who saw her father must pity him, he looked so careworn, old, and sad; while all who looked at Mr. Minister must admire him, he was so bright, handsome, and intellectual in appearance. Those were not exactly the words she used; neither was she accomplished enough to employ "artistic," but the latter was the term exactly suitable to the artist's appearance. He wore his hair rather long, had a bushy beard, and somewhat prominent eyebrows, and was gifted with the kindest,

brightest, and most penetrating grey eyes that May had ever seen. She did not wonder at her father trusting him, for she felt as if all who saw him must instinctively love him. Her poor father was different, and, either from nature or misfortune, looked not only sad but morose.

The question soon arose as to when the Welsh choir was to return to Wales, and the answer was "next week." Its members had yet work to do and sights to see, after which they would go back to their labours in the mines.

"I can never more part with this, my child," exclaimed Goldworthy, half-rising, in sudden excitement. "You must return without her. I will paint, work, become a new man for her; but she must not leave me."

"There will yet be time to talk of this," remarked Minister, soothingly. "We need settle nothing to-day."

"My father and mother will be lost without her," put in Laban. "I think it would be their death if we returned without her."

Their death! The thoughtless words electrified May, and brought back the wild look into her father's eyes. He suddenly seized her hand and, looking at her entreatingly, cried out in despair—

"Madeline, my child! my only hope! you will not leave me? Minister, my friend! say she shall not go from us."

"It shall all be arranged. We will manage it," replied Minister, with a warning glance at Laban.

May was terrified. Either she must never see her beloved grandparents again, she thought; or must forsake the strange, lonely, sorrowing father she had just found. Mr. Everton saw her perplexity, and whispered to her—

"The Lord will make your path straight, dear child."

"Yes, dear sir, I know," she returned, with one of the wise little nods her friends used to notice; and the perplexity departed from her fair face, leaving a loving security in its stead.

Meredith, too, as if to strengthen her, rose and stood behind her and her father.

"I know exactly what to do, dear papa," she said. "I

will write to great-grandfather, and he will tell me what is right. He always knows exactly."

"He will take you from me. He will never part with you. And he has the first right in you, for has he not saved you?" said her father, excitedly.

"Perhaps I can be half with you and half with them," suggested May, the irrepressible tears starting to her eyes.

"I have quite a large house, all to myself," here broke in Meredith. "Perhaps, by-and-bye, you could come and visit me, sir, and so Cousin May would be amongst all of us. It is situated in the loveliest valley in the whole world."

"Delightful!" exclaimed the artist. "I will come, too; and Goldworthy and I will have a sketching tour, and produce such pictures as shall make all our fortunes. Upon the strength of it, you cannot do better than share a poor artist's humble fare. Now, Goldworthy, make yourself presentable, and do me the favour of taking off that artistic robe, and donning your proper coat, for have we not a young lady to tea to-night?"

"Do you wish it, my child?" asked Goldworthy, with anxious eagerness.

"Oh yes, dear sir," replied May, catching the tone of her father's friend; "if you do not dislike it yourself."

He rose slowly and left the room.

"A good beginning," cried Minister, clapping his hands. "He has not laid aside that dressing gown for months. Now, sweet May take off the obstreperous bonnet, which will not keep on, and preside at our five o'clock—no, six o'clock tea."

May was looking at the door through which the gaunt man and flowered robe had just passed, and was thinking how she could best "minister to a mind diseased," and at the same time do her duty to those she loved best. She started at the words addressed to her.

"Oh, sir! I cannot, indeed I cannot," she exclaimed.

"Indeed you can, May. You always pour out tea at home," said Meredith.

"Come, and surprise your father. He will think him-

self in civilised life again. He avoids company, and flies from a stranger as from a fiery serpent. Nay, Mr. Morrison, you must stay. Unaccustomed! I take it an honour that you should sup with me."

The artist turned from one to another pleadingly. Laban excused himself, because, he said, quietly, he had never sat at a gentleman's table. Mr. Everton was afraid his wife would expect him, but Mr. Minister overruled them all. He led the way across a passage to a small dining-room, where tea was laid. He placed a chair for May at the head of the table with the words—

"You must sit here; I will help you. Your father will think himself at home. He shall sit on one side of you, I on the other. This will probably be your home for the present. You may save him yet. All he wants is something to live for. His disease is nervous despondency."

Bewildered May had never before heard of such a malady. It sounded awful. But she obeyed, and took the feminine post at the tea-table, not knowing what she did or what she ought to do. The others also seated themselves, leaving the place at May's right hand vacant. The host signed to a female servant, who appeared, to leave the room, and the little party sat expectant, all gazing on the door. It opened at last. Poor May's heart beat almost as painfully as when she had first met her father, as he appeared in frock coat and neat waistcoat and tie. He sat down by her side quite naturally.

"I am afraid I have been keeping you," he said, glancing round; then to May, with a sad smile, "Am I spruce enough for my little girl?"

Mr. Everton said grace, and May, trembling very much, began to pour out the tea under the direction of Mr. Minister. The table was spread with ample viands, and adorned with beautiful flowers. The room was pretty and artistic, and she felt truly as if she were in a strange dream. Still, her own father was near, and three of her dearest friends close by. That father watched her movements with eyes kindled into natural brightness, and sat

entranced while the others talked. All strove to be at ease, but it was with effort that May restrained her tears. Perhaps Meredith understood her best, but he felt, with a sort of regret, that he must again yield his place in her affections to another, and not even wait upon and aid her as of old. He heard her father's oft-repeated, "My darling, we will never, never part again," with a pang, and wondered sadly why so great a happiness as the reunion of father and child should, as this probably would, cause sorrow to loving hearts far away. But "I will write to great-grandfather," was all May could find to say.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GREAT-GRANDFATHER'S DECISION.

AGAIN there was a great gathering of the clans. This time it was at Willis's Rooms, where May had sung to the professors. One of the five hundred, she stood in the crowd, expectant, with Meredith at her side. It was a very Babel of tongues; now Welsh, now English, anon a mixture of both. The choir were receiving tickets, and were more excited than they had been even at the competition. They had, indeed, remained in London longer than was intended, to receive them. One was given to May, and another to Meredith, in their turn, and in course of time each member of the choir possessed a passport. May was all of a tremble when she took hers; indeed, she had been little else since her arrival in London.

It was four o'clock, and she saw that the grand gentlemen and ladies who formed the committee began to pair off, and she joined Rachel, who was looking for her. She felt much abashed at finding herself at the head of the sopranos, close behind the committee, for the choir had to

walk two and two, women and men being separate. Altos, tenors, and basses followed, and a goodly, if humble, procession they made. Naturally, a large crowd assembled to watch them as they left the Rooms, amongst which she espied her father, who had brought her thither, and patiently waited her exit. Smiles and nods passed between them, and as the long procession moved on he fell mechanically into its wake, the smiles which had greeted his child still lingering on his pale face. May had pointed him out to Rachel, who had not yet seen him, and who was strangely inquisitive about him.

It was "an army with banners," for in front of the procession the fiery dragon of Wales on a blue ground, and surrounded by many a "strange device," heralded his compatriots. Various were the comments made upon him, and the questions as to the meaning of "Y Ddraig Goch Ddyry Cydwyn," which were answered by, "Why, the Red Dragon leads the Van," to be sure, which caused more laughter than it deserved. But May did not join, for expectation had taken the place of retrospection, and she, together with the whole choir, were on its tip-toe.

Briskly, and to the sound of music, they wound along until May awoke from her dream in a beautiful garden. She was in fairyland, and the past eventful week had been after all only a chapter in a fairy tale. Smooth lawns and trees and flowers spread around her, and above, the sun shone bravely. She stood amongst the throng, gazing and wondering, until the whole choir filled the lawn, and were silently marshalled until they formed three sides of a square around some vacant rustic garden seats. All was so quiet that she almost expected to see the Sleeping Beauty somewhere, for her childish fancies still clung to her, and she never forgot her love of the pantomimes. Suddenly she found herself making a deep reverence with the rest, as the empty seats were filled by a goodly company. A cheer, begun in enthusiasm, was suppressed, and this large garden party was silent for a few moments.

May's eyes, a thousand eyes indeed, fell on the central figures that occupied the rustic seats. The one was a gallant gentleman, the other a gracious lady. She had never, she thought, seen any so grand and so sweet. If Meredith had been her "fairy prince," what were these? Truly a fairy prince and princess whom she had never expected to behold, for were they not in sober reality the Prince and Princess of Wales?

Yes, the Welsh choir were actually in the gardens of Marlborough House, come to sing before those for whom their hearts felt a devotion as loyal as did those of their ancestors for the Cymric princes, in whose defence they fought and died. An enthusiasm lay beneath that suppressed silence ready to be expressed in words or deeds should the occasion occur. As to May, her heart seemed to bound from its narrow enclosure as she watched this beautiful lady nod and beckon, and in another moment be surrounded by lovely children—her children—who came to hear how mountaineers and miners could sing. It was a scene as suggestive as it was gratifying and enlivening, and even the prize competition fell behind it in importance in the estimation of the earnest choristers who stood in glad triumph in the presence of the children and grandchildren of their beloved Queen.

And never was the National Anthem more enthusiastically sung than by this especially "national" choir. The concert began with it, and the lawns and alleys of the pleasant garden re-echoed the loyal prayer, while the sunlit heaven looked down approvingly. May, her soul in her face and voice, poured forth her loyalty with the rest, and was sure, quite sure, that she met the eyes of the Princess and received an especial smile as she sang. Several Welsh melodies followed, which, as the critics afterwards said, were "magnificently" sung, and amongst them the "March of the Men of Harlech," which resounded martially through the quiet demesne. Volumes of tone, intonation, and patriotism culminated in "God Bless the Prince of Wales," with which the brief concert

terminated. The interest, surprise, and admiration of the illustrious auditors were patent to all, and openly expressed by the Prince. Not only did he delight his harmonious visitors by shaking hands heartily with Caradoc, but he said, with upraised hat and genial manner—

"I thank you all for coming here, and hope that your visit has been as agreeable as your singing has been excellent. It has given the Princess and myself the greatest pleasure to receive you, and we wish you a safe journey home."

"Perhaps I shall not go home. I may see them again," thought May, in whose eyes tears were gleaming.

No repressive "Hush" now sounded, as cheer upon cheer arose, and May's fairy tale concluded by the gradual disappearance of the fairies. English and foreign they were who followed the fairy princess of the gracious smile into her palace, and May clasped her hands as she gazed after them, and involuntarily cried, "God bless them!"

She was soon awakened from this dream of fairyland by finding herself once more in the crowded, noisy streets.

"My child, it is over. You can now come with me," sounded in her ears.

A nervous grasp was on her arm, and she was drawn irresistibly from the procession, while every other member of the choir was enthusiastically eulogising those who had welcomed them so kindly and graciously. It seemed a strange finale to an unreal scene, to be borne away by this parent whom she scarcely knew, to a home which was not his. She knew not if she were happy or sad to be thus severed from those whom she had loved so long and so well; but she made no resistance. Already, only the previous Saturday—and this was Monday—he had accompanied her to the Crystal Palace, where the choir had given a concert, and had awaited her when it was over. He had himself taken her to see Mr. and Mrs. Everton, and they had remained with them at Norwood until late on Saturday night.

"She must be always with me; I can never part with her," he had said, not only to these kind friends, but to all others.

And now she returned with him to that pretty artist-house at Brompton, where Mr. Minister was awaiting them. It was a dream from beginning to end; but throughout it wandered the figures of her grandparents, who were "wanting her, always wanting her." She had written a long letter to them, in which she gave a simple but lucid account of the discovery of her father. She said that she longed—oh, how she longed!—to be with them again. She hoped to return with the choir, but she wished to do her duty. She prayed to God to direct her, but her path seemed very cloudy. This and much more she wrote, and she was expecting an answer in trembling and doubt. She knew that her grandfather would decide aright, but how would he decide?

Mr. Minister said that her father was a changed man. He called it a miracle, a miracle of love. Indeed, May herself was conscious of the change. The haggard face seemed to be kindled to cheerfulness, the wild eyes softened by affection. A small dressing-room had been prepared for May's bedroom, and here she was to sleep that night for the first time.

And it was here, when quite alone, that she began to realise the change in her position, to realise also that she was no longer a child. How different was everything by which she was surrounded from that to which she had been accustomed! She thought of her little loft at Derwen, wind-rocked and tree-sheltered, and wept at the recollection. It was dearer to her than the pretty, cretonne-curtained chamber in which she found herself. She tried to think that she might soon love her father more dearly even than her grandfather, but the habit of years was stronger than that of days. She glanced out of her window on the small walled garden, above which the lamps glimmered, and the beloved mountains and oaks of Derwen, the streams, glens, ravines, all stood in imagina-

tion before her. What a contrast! And she would probably have to decide between them on the morrow. She felt sure that her grandfather would not influence her, but would expect her to do her duty. Hitherto her duty had been quite clear to her; indeed, she had merely done what stood before her in her peaceful path; but now! She trembled as she reflected upon what might be expected of her. The anxiety she had felt only a few days before concerning Mrs. Richards's wish that she should utilise her voice was forgotten in this new anxiety. She felt for the first time since that day when, a lonely child, she left the Paddington Station, the actual burden of life, as, by intuition, she cast childhood behind her and assumed the responsibilities of womanhood. She examined her past and weighed her present. So doing, she knelt down and, like Hezekiah of old, laid her care before the Lord. Very earnestly and simply she asked to be directed aright in what she might have to decide on the morrow, and prayed for blessings on those dear ones she had left behind and on him whom she had found.

Thus, the morrow saw her cheerful and calm. The nine o'clock breakfast, with its adjuncts of newspapers and first posts, seemed strange, but she seated herself at Mr. Minister's request before the urn, while he looked at his letters. Then her father came in, enveloped in the flowery dressing-gown, and embraced her as if it were a parting instead of meeting, so long did he hold her in his arms.

"I dreamed that I had lost you again, my child! my Madeline!" he said.

"Oh, no, dear sir. I have been waiting and dressed since seven o'clock," she replied cheerfully. "I have been into the garden, and heard the—the——" she paused.

"The milkman call and the sparrows chirp," laughed Minister.

A shadow crossed her face, perceived by her father. "We will go into the country, my darling, as soon as I

have painted and sold more pictures. When will you hear from your grandfather?"

"Cousin Meredith has promised to bring the letter here as soon as it arrives. We—they—I mean the choir will return to Wales immediately," she said.

Meredith did, in fact, arrive before they had finished breakfast. He also had written to his grandfather, detailing what he had seen of May's father, and suggesting that he feared he was scarcely sane, and not a fitting person to have the charge of one so delicate and sensitive. His wish had been father to his thought, for he could not bear to lose May. He put a large envelope into her hand, directed in round but broken writing. She trembled so that she could not open it.

"You would rather read it alone," said Mr. Minister, opening the door. "Come into the other room."

She followed him to the pretty drawing-room, where he left her alone, so to speak, with her grandparents. There, amid all the artistic surroundings, she broke the seal—for the letter was sealed according to old Evan's custom. It was written in Welsh, and as carefully and precisely penned as if he had been fresh from school. She glanced through it, laid it down, took it up again, read and re-read it, then burst into tears. Few and decided were the words. She must remain with her father. This she mastered at once. "We shall grieve to lose thee, Merch fach, but thy first duty is to him," it said, "and we thank God that thou hast found him, and hope to see him and thee again some day, the Lord sparing us. Thou wilt be tender to him as thou hast been to us. A good grandchild will make an obedient daughter. We have many to care for us in our old age; thy father has but thee. Mysterious are the ways of the Lord! He knows that 'few are the days of our pilgrimage,' and has restored thee to thy father before He brings them to a close. May His love be ever with thee, and then it will matter little whether thou dwellest in cities made with hands, or here where His hills and woods abound. Thy grandmother bids me

tell thee that—— Well, child, her words, thou knowest, are many more than my rheumatic hands can write, but she will miss thee sorely. Our respects to thy father, and may God in heaven bless thee!"

May was sobbing audibly, when the door slowly opened and her father appeared. He drew back.

"My child! my Madeline! You shall not be made unhappy for my sake," he said, hastily. "Young man—Meredith, come here!"

Meredith came in, and May placed the letter in his hands.

"Read it to him; I cannot," she whispered. Then going to her father, still hesitating in the doorway, she put her arms round him, and added, as she raised her tearful face to his, "I am glad to live with you, dear sir, dear father; but—but—we love one another so fondly, that—that—I cannot—I cannot help grieving."

"Our grandfather says that he hopes you will soon bring Cousin May to Derwen," here interrupted Meredith. "She has been so long with us that you will not mind her natural grief."

"Yes, as soon as I have sold my picture. It shall be exhibited. I will work for her sake," replied the father, laying one hand on the young man's arm while he held his child's with the other.

"Shall I read the letter?" asked Meredith.

"Let Minister, my friend, my benefactor, come and listen," replied Goldworthy, hastily summoning the kind artist.

And they all sat down while Meredith slowly translated old Evan's letter.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TWO STUDIOS.

ONCE more at the Great Western Station! And what a crowd it was! The Welsh Choir had assembled to return to their native country, and May and her father were amongst them. She was surrounded by relatives and friends: Uncle Laban, Meredith, Rachel, Little Davy, and others, all pressing about her to say good-bye.

"I will write to you regularly, and tell you everything," said Meredith. "I shall probably soon see you again, for I am sure to be sent to London. You will write also?"

"Yes—oh, yes! Give my love to everyone. Say to great-grandfather that I will do exactly what he bids me. I am always thinking of him and grandmother and wishing——"

May paused, for her father was close by, and she felt that he was listening. Little Davy limped up.

"I will take care of Evan, Derwen Fach," he whispered. "Meredith is promising that I shall live with him and help him."

May's face brightened.

"I shall tell everybody what a grand lady you are, May," said Rachel, giving her a hearty kiss. "We shall be more jealous than ever."

"Good-bye, May. You will be coming back soon. We can't practise withou you. Is that your father? There's tall and thin he do look," sounded on all sides.

"God bless thee, my girl! Be a good daughter," were Uncle Laban's parting words. "You must bring her back soon, or she will be forgetting us all," he added to her father, shaking him warmly by the hand.

"I am afraid she will fade away and pine with me," returned Mr. Goldworthy, looking anxiously at May, who

was now separated from him, as she took leave of one and another of her friends.

She needed all the self-control she had summoned to her aid to prevent breaking down as she saw the carriages gradually fill with her beloved compatriots.

Suddenly she was greeted by Caradoc, who shook hands with her, and said he was sorry that she was not to return with them.

"Give her lessons; make a singer of her," he continued, hastily, to her father, who looked bewildered amongst the crowd—he who had fled from his fellow-creatures for years.

May took his hand, seeing how forlorn he seemed, and his clouded face cleared instantly. All her friends were seated save one. Meredith lingered for the last look and farewell, and had the satisfaction of receiving her parting words, and her father's timid assurances that he would make her happy—very happy, and that she should have and do all she desired.

There was a hearty cheer from the spectators on the platform, and a great waving of handkerchiefs by the inmates of the carriages as the train steamed off. The departure of the choir was as triumphant—indeed, more so—than its arrival, for had not its members succeeded in their undertaking? Had not they been *fêted* and lauded? had not they seen the greatest city in the world? and, before all, had they not been received and welcomed by their Prince and Princess?

Overflowing with rapture were the hearts that departed, and their joy found vent in song; but very sad was the one heart that remained behind. No attempt at self-control could any longer restrain May's tears, as she and her father stood at the far end of the platform to watch the train until the last wreath of white smoke had vanished.

"Madeline, my child, you are unhappy," said her father. "But I could not do without you."

"No, dear papa. I am only sorry to say good-bye," she replied, as cheerfully as she could.

And there was a throb of pleasure as she thought that, after all, her father wanted her most, for her grandparents had many to love and care for them—he had no one.

And so it gradually came to pass that, as she had been the sunbeam at Derwen Fawr, so she became the sunshine of the artistic house at Brompton. Like the Lady of Burleigh, she soon accustomed herself to her new position. It was not, certainly, a noble one ; still it was very different from the one she had so lately filled. Instead of being the child of the farm, she became the young lady of the suburban villa, and her two new friends and devoted slaves delighted in her simplicity, both of mind and dress. She gave herself wholly to her father, who, before the autumn had passed and chilly winter with its dense London fogs crept on, was comparatively well. She encouraged him to paint, she sang to him, walked with him, worked for him, and, as housewife and companion, she became necessary, not only to him, but his friend. Yet was her heart in Wales.

Ridiculous as it may seem to many, Terpsichore was her great consolation. She occupied a conspicuous place in her room, and when her heart was heavy, she would stand and contemplate this full-dressed Welshwoman, until her grandmother seemed to stand before her, laughing and talking as she used to do, and this would bring mirth and comfort to her imaginative mind. She could always talk better to silent things than to lively, and her reserve was a source of trouble to her father, though he could not endure much conversation.

"I am afraid she is not happy," was his constant complaint to Minister.

"She will be happy enough when the winter season begins," the artist replied.

During the months of September and October, she was alone with her father, Minister having gone on a sketching tour. They employed a portion of this time in visiting her old haunts, and she shrank at the recollection of what she had gone through. She looked with terror on the miser-

able poverty of the locality where her poor mother had died; but she strove to soften it to her father by commenting on Mr. Everton's kindness. They frequently went to Norwood to visit him and his wife, and May's greatest pleasure was to talk over the past with her dear friend Edith. It was to her she turned for advice under difficulties, and to Everton for counsel concerning her father when Mr. Minister was away.

But matters shaped themselves wonderfully to her needs. She knew that her father was now as anxious to get money as he had been hitherto careless of it; for he began to feel himself a burden on Minister, though he actually threw funds enough into the common exchequer to repay him for his and May's portion of the family expenses.

"Now, my Madeline, we will have the lessons, the piano, the harmonium, all!" he exclaimed, one morning, bursting in upon her, as she sat at work in his studio, awaiting him.

She was humming a Welsh air, and thinking of the friends who were so far off.

"Yes, papa; I am so glad you have come. You have been so long away!" she said, rising.

"You have missed me, my darling!" he said, kissing her. "I have a hundred pounds for that small picture I finished yesterday. I have ordered the piano; I have engaged the masters!"

"But, dear papa, Mr. Minister hoped you would have exhibited it," remonstrated May, who had taken her tone from Minister.

"I will finish this—I will paint another," he replied, taking up a brush, and standing before the great painting, still uncompleted.

It was with difficulty he could be kept to consecutive work at one subject, and it was to this May was to urge him. The picture he had sold was one he had thrown off rapidly.

The piano arrived in the course of the day, and May

was soon in her element. Celebrated masters came, both for music and singing, who were as much delighted with her talent as she was with their instruction. No better incentive to her father's industry could have been imagined than her practice in one room while he worked in another. Her voice seemed to inspire his pencil, and so they sang and painted, happy in the arts they loved. Yet to May it seemed a dreamy, unreal life, and she pined for the active delights of the country.

Still, it was very sweet and pathetic to watch the pair, and listen to their fragmentary conversation. If the father flagged in his work, May was at his side, her hand on his shoulder, encouraging him to proceed.

"Dear papa," she would say, "the first of May is my especial day, because, you know, I was May Queen at the pantomime, and Mr. Minister says the Royal Academy opens on that day. How delightful it would be to see this beautiful picture there, and those other smaller ones you hope to paint. I think it would be almost the happiest day of my life."

"But, my child, I am not sure that it will be hung. It may be rejected, or, if accepted, *skyed*," he answered, resuming his brush and painting vigorously.

"Skyed! What does that mean, dear papa?"

"Hung so high, my darling, that only the Olympian gods can see it. And we sublunary mortals like to be admired by our fellow-creatures, and to be hung, as they say, on the line; not *by* the line—ha! ha!"

May rejoiced to hear her father laugh. The glad cachinnations of amusement rarely sounded in their pretty studios, and although she did not rightly understand his joke, she laughed with him as merrily as she could. She often thought of the innocent jests and merriment of the past, and longed to see old Peggy hold her sides for very exuberance of jollity.

"You will take me to see the pictures if—if yours is not skyed? I could not bear to see this beautiful landscape anywhere but in the foreground. I think I am in dear old

Wales again when I see the blue distance, and the gorse and heather growing and blossoming. And the sheep! Oh, dear papa, now that you are introducing the sheep it is so natural! They are like great-grandfather's flock, and the dog is Hedfa over again."

"My darling! my Madeline! It shall have the best place in the exhibition! Talk to me of your sweet mother and you will inspire me. Then sing me 'Llwyn On' and this ash will grow under my fingers."

"How did you know that 'Llwyn On' meant 'ash grove,' dear papa?"

"Your sweet mother used to sing it. Ah! she was healthful and innocent as you when I took her away from her home. What if I should kill you, too, my child?"

"Great-grandfather used to say that life and death are not in our hands, dear papa. And we are so happy together. Besides, it is right that parents and children should cling to one another, whatever the consequences. You know you did not mean to leave dear mamma, and she always taught me to pray for your return. I remember that she was always looking for you when she took me to the pantomime and fetched me away."

"Ah, my love! we will go to the pantomime at Christmas. You shall see the gorgeous pageant that employs so many little ones, far, far too young to minister to the amusement of others. And you! rescued! rescued!"

"Great-grandfather thinks acting wicked, dear papa. I should be sorry to do anything he would disapprove." May thought with a shudder of her poor crown and Terpsichore, cast upon the hard, coal fire. "But I should dearly like to see the children at tea at the Crystal Palace. Mr. Everton says that some good ladies and gentlemen invite them to tea, and talk kindly and religiously to them, advising them to be good."

May was alluding to the "Theatrical Mission," which began that very year, and has since developed into a great general scheme for the benefit of actresses.

"We will attend it, my darling, and, when I get more money, subscribe to it," said her father, enthusiastically.

"Oh! papa, what a glorious light!" exclaimed May, as he dotted a gleam of sunshine into his picture. "The thought of doing good inspired you with that beautiful idea."

She clasped her hands and stood entranced, as her father, by a touch here and there, conveyed warmth to the hitherto sombre colouring. He was almost as much delighted as she.

"How much more briskly they move!" he exclaimed.

"They like the sunshine. So did Hedfa. It makes one happy to think they are only going to the fold before sunset," she returned. "Think how glad dear Mr. Minister will be when he comes back, to find so bright a picture."

It was, indeed, a work of genius—fitful and peculiar, still of genius—and May was astonished to perceive that some sudden impetus moved his fingers into rapidity and his mind into activity. It also induced silence; so she stole back into her apartment and began to practise. The fingers, accustomed to the harmonium, were beginning to adapt themselves to the piano, which she had rarely tried at Derwen Fawr; and the voice, trained to Welsh part singing and national melodies, was being further perfected by the principles and teaching of Art. The red baize door was always open between the two rooms, so that while she studied, she almost fancied she could hear the soft strokes of her father's brush, while he was inspired or soothed by her always sweet, birdlike notes.

"I, too, must earn my bread some day," she reflected, as time wore on, in that new and artistic home.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIRST OF MAY.

It was the first of May, and Madeline Goldworthy was the happiest of May Queens. She undrew the cretonne curtains very early in the morning, and looked out upon the little walled garden. It was quite like a paradise, for had she not worked in it, and planted spring flowers, and was it not dedicated to her? She sang as she dressed for very joy of heart. She smiled and thought of her grandfather, as she tried to restrain the exuberant golden headgear by a piece of blue ribbon; for the hair was as restive as ever, and called forth as much remark.

"But for it I should never have found my dear papa," she said.

She was usually down stairs long before the others; but on this first of May they were awaiting her, and—oh, surprise and joy!—there stood her dear Cousin Meredith.

"Meredith! come at last!" she exclaimed, putting her hands in his, and receiving the old cousinly embrace. "How is great-grandfather? how are they all? Now you will see the pictures!"

While she was speaking, and before Meredith had time either to release her hands or to reply, her father and Mr. Minister stood behind her and placed a wreath on her head. She felt its slight pressure, and turned to see what they were doing.

"Grandfather sent it, Cousin May," said Meredith. "He got the children to make it yesterday of all the flowers you loved best. I had to come up on business by the night mail, so I brought it, and it is quite fresh. He told me to give you his love and blessing, and to say he hoped to see you again before——"

"Hush!" interrupted Minister. "Nothing but life on the first of May. Look, Madeline, what a lovely crown it

is," and he led her to an oval mirror that hung against the wall.

"Oh, how pretty! How kind of great-grandfather!" she exclaimed, tell-tale tears springing to her eyes.

"My May Queen, indeed! Crowned to inaugurate a new era of joy and success," said her father, pressing his lips on her fair brow.

"How fresh, how sweet, how woodlike it is!" cried bewildered May, standing in the midst of her friends. "It is like being under the oaks at Derwen. The hyacinths overpower the violets; but then we have so few scented violets in Wales—and there is actually hawthorn."

"Yes; grandfather sent ever so far for it. He was quite poetic, and said he must have the May for his 'child.' And I was to tell you that little Gwen, Leah's eldest girl, helped to make it. She is quite clever at stringing berries for New Year's Day, and twining spring garlands."

"We will paint her, Goldworthy, just as she stands, admiring herself in the mirror," laughed Minister, who was for ever sketching May in some attitude or other.

"Oh, please, not looking in the glass," exclaimed May, hastening to the breakfast table, and appearing quite abashed beneath her pretty crown.

She was no longer awkward in the duties, but began to perform them naturally, while her father and Minister opened their letters.

"I have actually a friendly letter once more!" said the former. "This is neither from dealer nor dun, but from our benefactor, Mr. Everton."

"Not to put us off!" exclaimed May.

"No, but to ask us to bring Cousin Meredith with us. Mr. Richards has written to say that he is to be in town this morning, and Mr. and Mrs. Everton greatly hope that he will join their little party."

"Thank you, but will you say I cannot? I have an engagement," stammered Meredith.

He looked at May, and met her anxious and appealing glance.

"Oh, do come, dear cousin! Then it would be quite perfect," she said.

"Of course he will come, my queen," said Minister. "This is your day, and you are to be denied no request. But we must not lose time in discussion, or we shall come in for the crowd at the Academy. And your cousin must be famishing after travelling all night; besides the anxiety he must have passed through concerning the wreath."

"To say nothing of the soaking," laughed Meredith. "For the moss in which it was enclosed was so wet, that it soon saturated the box, and penetrated to the skin."

"You have not taken cold?" asked May, alarmed, which elicited a laugh from her three admirers.

Meredith did honour to his good breakfast, and as May watched him, she said to herself, "There is no one in London half so nice or so good-looking as Cousin Meredith," which was certainly immoderate commendation, seeing that London contains some four millions of people.

Still, he was a very comely young man, and quite presentable in any society. He and May were equally remarkable for a certain adaptability which inherent nobility of character gives. His advancement in this world's good was rapid, and his talent and industry, together with his devotion to the interests of his employer, bid fair to raising him to the rank of master.

May could neither eat nor drink for watching and wondering. Her life-long fairy tale seemed to have come to its climax. There was Cousin Meredith quite a gentleman. Mr. Minister, benefactor, poet, artist, all in one; and there was her father, "clothed and in his right mind;" while she, the poor little pantomimist, was almost, nay quite as happy there with them as she had been in the old place, to which she was, nevertheless, longing to return. God had, truly, "tempered the wind to the shorn lamb."

They were soon, all four of them, seated in a Brompton omnibus, on their way to Piccadilly, and finally reached Burlington House. May had been there with her father to see the winter exhibition, so it was not altogether new

to her. But she had only one object at that moment, and scarcely glanced at the pictures, until she stood before the landscape she had watched until she loved it as a personal friend.

"Here it is, Cousin Meredith!" she cried. "Hung on the line, in one of the very best places, and not skyed! Is it not beautiful? Do not the sheep look as if they were going to the fold with Hedfa? You see it is sold already."

And such was the case. The picture, so fitfully painted, so long in progress, was amongst the gems of the exhibition, and had been sold for five hundred pounds. Meredith had a taste for all that was beautiful, and his expressions of admiration satisfied May. They were more to her than the praises of the public.

"Now we will come and see Mr. Minister's pictures," she said, perceiving that their earnest comments attracted the attention of the bystanders. "They all admire it," she added, in a whisper, as remarks were made in its praise.

Her father and his friend had withdrawn to a little distance, and the young people joined them.

"It is nature itself. Oh, sir, nothing could be more truthful and beautiful!" said Meredith, and no words of commendation could have given greater pleasure to the painter or his child.

"It is all May's work. Had I not found her it had never been finished!" said Goldworthy.

Mr. Minister was an artist of reputation, and had several pictures in the exhibition. He was chiefly a figure painter. They went from one to another, until Meredith exclaimed—

"Why, May, this is you!"

"Oh, no. It is a young lady going to a party; only Mr. Minister took my hair, you see, because it is exactly like the hair they used to wear frizzed up above the face and neck, like 'quills upon the fretful porcupine,' he says."

It was May, nevertheless, albeit attired in brocade and lace, with pearls in her hair, and fan in hand.

"I like you best as you are, dear May," said Meredith.

"Oh, yes, cousin; but Mr. Minister wanted me so, and called me his 'artist's model.'"

And so they wandered through the rooms, till the crowd thickened, and Goldworthy, anxious to escape observation or recognition, proposed that they should withdraw and return another day. As Meredith had business in the City, and Minister elsewhere, May and her father went back to Brompton alone.

They did not remain there long. They took a hasty luncheon, after which May withdrew to her room to change her dress. How pretty she looked in that soft, dove-coloured lama, with its pink bows and white lace ruffles! It was a present from her father, and worn for the first time. As she gave the finishing touch to her attire she caught Terpsichore's eyes glaring at her from her seat on a neighbouring chest of drawers. She laughed merrily as she said aloud—

"How proud grandmother would be of me in this new dress!"

Her father was waiting for her. He had carefully replaced the wreath in its box of damp moss, and enveloped the whole in brown paper.

"You must show Mrs. Everton your great-grandfather's crown," he said.

"Oh, yes, dear papa. She will think she is in the woods again when the scent of the hyacinths greets her, just as I did this morning."

A slight shadow passed over the father's brow.

"We will also have our sketching tour, my darling," he said.

"Oh, yes, dear papa. But I was not thinking of that. Mrs. Everton and I are very happy, only we love the country and the flowers."

They were soon on their way to Sydenham, and reached the Crystal Palace about four o'clock. Here Mr. and Mrs. Everton met them, and took them to a private room, where a lady whom they knew personally was about to give a tea to the ladies and children of the ballet.

May was asked to preside at one of the tables, and was soon surrounded by a score of children.

She knew them to be little dancers, though they dressed like ordinary poor children. She was at home with them at once, remembering her own childhood. They were as ready to talk as to eat and drink, and she rejoiced to think that their wearied limbs were resting and their bodies strengthened by food during the brief interval "between the acts."

"Give them plenty of cake, dear papa," she whispered to her father, who was waiting upon them at her request.

And he obeyed, delighting the young people by his politeness and attention. While the meal was in progress May learnt that all these children were playing much the same *rôle* as she had played, and determined, with her father's permission, to help them if she could. This was the second year that good Christian people had sought to benefit them, and Mr. Everton had told her that their endeavours were already blessed, and that friends were seeking to aid them round about other theatres besides that at the Crystal Palace.

While she was pouring out the last cup of tea she was startled by the words, in an eager voice—

"Were you not once the May Queen at the —— Theatre?"

Giving her father the cup, she turned to see a girl about her own age, and pale as herself, who was poorly though tidily dressed.

"Yes. How did you know me? Who are you?" she asked.

"I knew you by your hair. I was Mother Hubbard. You had a doll you called Terpsichore. I had a dog named Cerberus."

"I know—I remember," cried May, rising, and grasping her old friend's hand. "Where do you live? Can I come to see you?"

"We lodge with Mrs. Pope, but not where you used to lodge," was the reply.

"Mrs. Pope!" exclaimed May. "Oh, I am glad! What is the address?"

There was a sudden call for silence, and a request that all would take their seats.

"Hush! May I sit by you? The kind gentleman is going to address us who spoke to us once before. They are trying to help us to lead good lives in the midst of our many temptations," whispered May's friend.

They seated themselves side by side, Mr. Goldworthy standing behind May's chair. A hymn was sung first, in which she heartily joined, sharing her friend's book.

"I suppose you are a public singer now!" said the latter, when the hymn was done.

"No; but I have found my father," replied May.

Then she gave all her mind to Mr. Everton, who addressed the young actresses, by whom he was surrounded, kindly and appropriately. It is not necessary to give his brief sermon here. Suffice it to say that it was suitable to the needs of those to whom he spoke, and that not only deep attention but occasional tears accompanied his words. Another hymn, another short address, and a prayer concluded this, to May, especially interesting reunion.

"Tell Mrs. Pope that I will come and see her, then I shall meet you again," she said, as she wrote the address of her old landlady on her father's tablets.

"And you will come and see my child?" broke in Mr. Goldworthy; then whispering to May, "Now Mrs. Pope will help us to find your dear mother's grave, and we can raise the monument and plant the rose."

"Good-bye! good-bye!" said the children, pressing round May, and she perceived that the party was breaking up, for its members would soon have to "play their mimic parts again."

Shaking hands with one and another, and embracing her old friend, she and her father watched them as they dispersed. Each received a book or tract as they passed through the door, and all bore away with them a sense of

thankfulness for the Christian love that prompted the gathering.

"I might still have been thus but for God's mercy and great-grandfather," thought May.

And that evening, when she, her father, Mr. Minister, and Meredith were quietly conversing about many things with Mr. and Mrs. Everton, she inquired the way by which she might be of use in this mission. As she sat amongst her friends with her pretty wreath on her head, she felt bewildered by the events of the day. She was thankful for its many blessings, and her heart beat joyfully at sight of Meredith, who was apparently quite self-possessed in the presence of "Miss Edith." Indeed, the evening was as pleasant as the day had been. The old friends sang and talked of Derwen, while the new ones discussed art and the miracles always enacting in London, silently acknowledging that not the least of these was the meeting as friends of that little party at Norwood.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EVAN'S DREAM.

In July and August all London goes a touring. The great city is deserted and the country invaded. Even quiet Derwen had its visitors, and the station was a very different scene on one especial autumn day from what it was when May first landed on it, a lovely six-year-old child. It was actually dotted all over with people, although it was not market day; and when the train arrived there was quite a hubbub. One would have thought that it was an excursion train at least, so great was the excitement. Yet only two passengers descended from it, who were instantly surrounded by friends, all of whom seemed to

talk at once. The burden or the refrain of those assembled to receive the travellers was, "Welcome home, May fach."

Yes, the arrivals were May and her father, and all the clan Morrison had come to meet them, besides other old friends. Meredith was, however, the one to help them out of the carriage, and afterwards to see to their luggage. May had as much as she could do to return the warm greetings and introduce her father.

"Aunt 'Lizbeth! how kind of you to come! how well you look! This is my dear papa," on one side.

"I am remembering him, sure. How do you do, Mr. Goldworthy?" in reply.

"Cousin Leah, and Rachel, and little Gwen. Oh, I am glad to see you all again!" on another.

"And you so grown, Cousin May. Why, you are as tall as I am!" from Leah.

"Papa, this is Dai Bach, and this is Cousin George, and here is the vicar, and here comes Uncle Laban."

Mr. Goldworthy had more than he could do in shaking hands with friends, old and new, while many memories crowded upon him.

"How are great-grandfather and grandmother?" asked anxious May of Dai Bach.

"All of a fluster to think of seeing you, May; but they couldn't come to the station."

"Oh, no," sighed May; "but I shall see them to-morrow."

Instead of Evan's old cart, and Siriol to draw it, a neat dog cart awaited the travellers, into which Meredith stowed their luggage, a great portion of which was made up of Mr Goldworthy's easel and sketching apparatus.

"I shall see you all again to-morrow," was the farewell of happy May, as she took her seat beside Meredith, her father mounting behind.

A drive of three or four miles over hill and down dale brought them to Meredith's house. May had not seen this since it had been changed from manager's offices

into manager's abode, and she exclaimed, as they approached it—

"Oh, Cousin Meredith, how delightful! This is our fairy tale again."

Although the house was situated in the centre of the mining district, it was not disfigured or incommoded thereby, being surrounded by trees and backed by mountains. It lay beyond Leah's old house, and was about a mile from Laban's. The silent pool that was the source of the rapid, dancing, mischievous brook which ran through the hamlet into the valleys was up among the hills behind it, and in front was the delightful vale of Derwen.

It was no wonder that Mr. Goldworthy sat speechless and entranced at sight of this beautiful scene, and that May could scarcely speak for tears.

One old friend came to hold the horse, another stood in the doorway as domestic servant, and two or three others were lingering about the place. The greetings were true and hearty, and as May shook hands with all in turn she presented her father to them with shy pride, who shook hands also.

"She isn't spoilt by going to London," she heard one whisper to another in the old familiar tongue.

It was a good-sized house with stone porch and mullioned windows, and was surrounded by a garden. May was enchanted by the flowers and shrubs, partly cultivated, partly wild. On one side was a natural bank covered with ferns, gorse, and heather, and surmounted by a tangled hedge of roses, privet, hawthorn, and what not, while on the other were a few beds filled with geraniums, calceolarias, and other autumnal flowers.

"I had them planted that you might not miss your pretty garden at Brompton," said Meredith, as they walked up the path covered with grey gravel, or rab, as it is called.

"Look, my darling, my Madeline, we have a picture before us," said Mr. Goldworthy, pausing beneath the

porch to survey the expanse of hill, wood, water, and cornfields that lay before them. "This is too enchanting. We shall not want to go farther, and shall tire you out, Meredith."

"The longer you stay the better, sir. This is your studio," replied the young man, opening a door that led into a comfortable parlour, where a fire was burning cheerfully. "You are to do exactly as you like, for this half of the house is yours, as we agreed. I have put the harmonium here, Cousin May."

It had been settled that Mr. Goldworthy should pay his portion of the household expenses, and have his private rooms, and that his friend Minister might join him when he liked. On no other terms would he accept Meredith's invitation to make Glenpant his abode, or rather headquarters, for the autumn.

"You must be my guest this first evening," said Meredith, opening another parlour door, and displaying a table groaning with good cheer, and a hob on which stood a steaming kettle. "And this is one of Hedfa's puppies that grandfather has reared for you, Cousin May," he added, as a riotous pup jumped about him.

"Are they not kind? Is it not delightful, dear papa?" was all that May could articulate.

"It is, indeed, my child," replied the father, gazing from the window on the rising moon to conceal his deep emotion.

They were a happy trio that evening as they sat round the fire, discoursing of things past and present, Hedfa's puppy in May's lap and her hand in her father's. Meredith's room was full of books, maps, pictures, papers, all that could contribute to the improvement of his mind and the furtherance of his work. He told them that he had resumed the secretaryship of the Institute, and his classes both on Sunday and once a week, and that he joined the musical practices whenever he had time. He said that Dai Bach was now under instruction as organist, and that Miss Richards had taken May's place until he was ready.

It was hoped and expected that May would take the organ while in the country. This she agreed to at once with her father's consent. It evolved, incidentally, that Meredith's salary increased yearly, and that there was every prospect of his eventually becoming a shareholder in the mine he had been the means of reopening. In fact, Mr. Richards and other influential men had such a high opinion of him that he was pretty sure, if life were spared, to be a man of mark and wealth in the course of years. He did not say this, but his friends knew it.

May and her father were as communicative and confidential with him as he with them. The latter said, with a half sigh, that a career was opened before him when he was waxing old, but for May's sake he hoped to pursue it. He had been a burden on his friend Minister long enough, and it was now his wish either to make a separate home for himself and child, or to come to some agreement with Minister as to the expenses.

But both the young people knew that he was a dreamy man, and looked at one another instinctively, as he spoke of his future. They had little doubt that he would paint beautiful pictures; but they misdoubted his capacity for managing his own affairs. It was with some difficulty that May spoke of herself. She had an intuitive dislike so to do, even to Meredith, although she had not yet had experience enough of life to prove to herself that the wisest people are those who the most seldom use the little pronouns *I* and *me*.

However, she and her father between them told Meredith that her musical education progressed so rapidly as to cause her masters to propose her studying the art as a profession, either as public artiste or private teacher.

May inclined to the latter, her father to neither, and Meredith gave no opinion. He could only look at his sweet and gifted cousin, and think of her future and his own with a kind of uncertain hope; while she was sufficiently happy in the present to leave the days to come to shape themselves.

And so the quiet evening passed.

The following morning Meredith was up when the early birds began their *réveillé*, for he was obliged to go to a distance, and would not be back until the evening. But May was down as soon as he. She looked bright as the golden morning as she stood in the porch to see him mount his horse, and to watch him canter across the mountain road. Then she wandered out among the ferns and flowers, happier than the birds that now sang in full chorus above the house. Her father soon joined her, and she was thankful to see the calm and repose of nature reflected in his usually fitful glance.

"How delightful, my darling!" was all he said.

After breakfast they started together for a "home tour," as May phrased it. First, across the mountain and down the ravine to Tygwyn. She knew and greeted everyone they met. They found Aunt 'Lizbeth in the beehive chair, and Leah busy about the house. They did not stay long, though long enough to note many fresh comforts, the result of Meredith's thoughtfulness for his parents, and to hear Aunt 'Lizbeth acknowledge that she was better and stronger than she used to be. Then she led her father through the oak wood, and so to the well-known garden gate.

"It was here grandmother met me," she said, her heart beating as rapidly as it did on that occasion.

In another minute she was within that dear old room, and before her father had mounted the steps had her arms round her grandfather.

"I knew thee wouldst come, child, and I waited in," he said, laying his hand on her head.

But she could not speak for tears. At last she sobbed out, "Dear great-grandfather, I am so glad," and he added, "God bless thee, Merch fach, and I thank Him that I have lived to see this day."

"Here she is, Dai Bach; here she is, Mally!" broke in upon the solemnity and pathos of the meeting, and old Peggy appeared.

"She looked bright as the golden morning."

Another fond embrace, and then May looked round for her father. He was standing in the doorway. She went to him and led him in.

"Here is my dear papa, great-grandfather," she said.

Evan made an effort to rise from the settle, but Goldworthy, who was the most nervous of the party, sat down by his side. Their hands clasped, and there was peace between them.

"I thank the Lord for all His mercies," said the old man, and "Amen," reverently replied Goldworthy; while Peggy again broke up the scene by a boisterous welcome.

Over a year had elapsed since May left Derwen, and there was little perceptible change in the old people. They had missed her sorely every day and all day, but Dai Bach had taken up his abode with them and did his best to supply her place, while Mally was there daily. The orphan boy was very grateful, as she had been, and read and sang to them of an evening as she had done, but still, as they would say to one another, "He is not May."

"You will spare her to us now and then, sir," said Evan to Goldworthy.

"Every day, whenever you like. She but replaces her of whom I robbed you," he replied.

"Have you paid your duty to Mrs. Richards, child?" asked old Peggy, who had a becoming sense of the proprieties. "Miss Richards is going to marry the vicar. They have been a long time about it. I hope you won't be so long making up your mind. But I suppose you'll be picking up some fine Londoner."

May shook her head, and Peggy laughed, saying that she looked like her old self again. Then May told her that she and her father were going to call at Derwen Fawr, and would come back to tea.

"In time for me to set the cups and saucers," she added.

"Go you and come back quick," said Peggy.

No sooner had they departed than there was a great commotion in the little farm. Everybody was setting

everything to rights, and Evan was in and out continually, until Peggy declared he was getting "quite a molly in his old age."

May and her father returned about four o'clock, having seen Mrs. Richards and her daughters, and been cordially welcomed by them, and visited the Institute. May busied herself at once in arranging the tea-table as of old, while her father and grandfather had much serious discourse. Peggy and her dependents had prepared all sorts of dainties, and May declared she had not seen such cream and eggs since she left Wales, and as for the cream-cakes—oh, dear! there were no such delicious things to be found out of the country.

Evan and Mr. Goldworthy on the settle, Peggy opposite, May pouring out the tea, and little Davy assisting. What a happy party! and what more could be desired? One thing, perhaps.

"I wish Cousin Meredith would come. He promised to do his best to be here early," said May.

And he came soon after they were all seated round the table.

"Now it is perfect," thought May, as she welcomed him with her sweet smile.

Little Davy made way for him; but he was too generous to take the lad's place next May, and seated himself near his grandmother.

When the meal was over it was May who cleared the table and washed up the tea-things, and as she moved about like a fairy, Evan murmured many a "God bless her!" and as to old Peggy, she never ceased exclaiming—

"She's as handy as ever, though I declare she's dressed as prettily as any fine lady."

When the clatter of house-work ceased, Evan pointed to May's harmonium, and asked for some music. She was soon seated before it, with Meredith and Dai Bach on either side of her, and Hedfa's nose on her lap. The low-raftered room soon sounded with song, which seemed to be echoed by the choruses of birds in the great oaks without.

All was aglow with sunshine, and a more beautiful family picture could scarcely be imagined. During the pauses in the music the two men on the settle spoke in whispers, and Peggy, garrulous as ever, applauded aloud.

"Mrs. Richards is all for her 'coming out,' as she calls it," said Evan. "But I'm for women keeping in their places, and minding their own business."

"I hope there will be no necessity for her to do anything for her livelihood. So long as I am spared in tolerable health, and my mind is clear, I can support both," whispered Goldworthy.

"God willing!" said Evan. "I shall not live to see it, but I have my thoughts and wishes. They are very fond of one another. Like brother and sister heretofore, but I believe the day will come when they may be more to one another. You will not object!" breathed old Evan, as the music went on.

"Object!" repeated Goldworthy, and while the word was on his lips, Laban entered.

He was soon swaying himself to and fro, beating time, and joining in the music, standing behind the performers.

"He is just like a boy, is Laban," said Peggy.

"They are saying that Mr. Richards is going to live at a grand place in the next county, and that he means Meredith to live at Derwen Fawr," continued Evan, still under his breath. "What a blessing he and May would prove to the miners. It is my constant prayer that this may be brought to pass. Then you could live with them, and—But I am getting foolish in my old age. It is all in the hands of the Lord."

"It is a pleasant dream. May it be realised!" said Goldworthy, bowing his head.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RETURNED FROM HER TRAVELS.

We will now take the liberty of leaping over a year. We left Madeline Goldworthy at Derwen surrounded by all she loved best; we find her in North Wales filling the important post of *prima donna* at a large concert, given in aid of the sufferers from a great colliery explosion. Since we saw her last she has spent many months abroad with her father, but her heart has ever been, and still is, in her beloved Wales. As she sits on the broad platform, the centre of observation and attraction, she looks sweet and simple as ever, but so thoroughly a lady that the large assembly before her ask if she can possibly be the young girl whom many of them remembered at the competition at the Crystal Palace. But the wonderful tissue of golden threads that interweave so perplexingly about her head convinces them. She is surrounded by the best musicians, both vocal and instrumental, of the principality—amateurs and professionals—yet she is not nervous. Although she has not sung in public since that first essay with the great Welsh choir, she is neither shy nor perplexed, for she is going to use her talent for the benefit of others, and she has resolved to do her best. Song is as easy as speech to her, and flows from her more readily, so she concentrates her mind on what she is about to do, and when her turn comes, she performs her part easily and without embarrassment. She ignores self, and thinks only of the maimed colliers yet alive, and the widows and orphans of the dead.

The music is principally Welsh, so she is in her element, and when the instrumentalists begin with an overture composed of native melodies, she can scarcely keep her seat for enthusiasm. She has not heard such, to her, soul-stirring strains for at least twelve long months, and

although she has been in Italy and Germany, and listened and learnt with loving will, she returns to the airs of her childhood with honest affection. And then the harps! the dear harps! How charmed she is to hear them again!

Her first song is "The Rising of the Lark," and she might almost be the bird itself, so sweet and penetrating is her voice. And while it soars aloft or sinks earthwards, she is thinking of the cause for which her "long-drawn cadences" arise, and ignoring self, touches all hearts. She is applauded, encored, and made to sing again and again. With a simple grace that is singularly her own, she acknowledges the compliments lavished upon her, and before the concert concludes has sung, not only in the native Cymric, but in English and Italian. Let those who remember the "Queen o' the May" when she performed her innocent, pantomimic dance at Derwen Fawr, think of her, now she has grown up, as the same artistic and unconscious May as then. Let them also greet her as one whose affections are as strong for the old friends and the old scenes as when she dwelt among the mountains of her beloved Derwen.

"Where is she? What has become of her?" sounded in the hall when the concert ended.

"She left as soon as she had sung her last song," replied the conductor. "She has made the concert a great success, and is certainly a charming singer."

Yes; May had disappeared alone through a private door, concealed from observation by a veil and light cloak. She had hastened down the principal street of the town to a small house in its suburb, where she found her father.

"Dear papa, how have you got on? Have you taken your medicine, and did Mrs. Lewis bring you the beef-tea?" she said, entering a pretty room that looked upon a glorious view of mountains.

"Yes, my darling; I have performed all your orders with miraculous exactitude," replied Mr. Goldworthy, putting his arm round her as she stooped to kiss him.

He was lying on a sofa, evidently out of health. But

his malady was more of the body than of the mind, though touching both. His face was thin and pale, but his eyes

"Dear papa, how have you got on?"

were clear and calm, having lost the restless expression they had when May was restored to him.

"What an endless concert it has been!" he said, when May, having taken off her things, busied herself at the tea-table, laid against her return. "I tried to paint a little, but strength failed me; then I made an effort to read, and wanted your opinion of the book. I am sadly selfish, but every minute seems an hour when you are away."

"Dear papa, I thought it would never come to an end. It would have been over long ago but for the encores. As Mr. Minister says, they wanted enough for their money," returned May, laughing.

"They encored my darling, doubtless! Why was I not there? Had you much applause? If so, what will great-grandfather say when he reads the papers?"

"I am afraid he will think me very bold. But I could not refuse, dear papa. You said so. And if I have helped to raise money for the explosion fund, I feel almost sure he will forgive my singing in public. My heart was with that sad explosion at Derwen years ago all the time I was singing; and it seems strange that Cousin Meredith should have had a narrow escape of his life in this North Wales explosion, as he had in the South."

"He is always where duty calls. If I had been like him, I should be a rich man now, instead of a poor one. But I am rich in you, my child."

"And I in you, dear papa. And we shall have plenty of money when you are able to paint again and I begin to teach."

This conversation was interrupted by the entrance of May's old friends, Mrs. Richards and her two unmarried daughters.

"Why did you run away?" they asked, breathlessly. "Such a success, Mr. Goldworthy! You would have been proud could you have been present."

"Hush!" said the father, with a glance at May. "Take not the bloom from the peach, the blush from the rose. I am glad she did not disappoint you, Mrs. Richards," he continued. "It was kind of you to come

so far out of your way, first to take her to the concert, and now to visit us again."

"It was kind of you to let her sing, and of May to be so ready, and—to do so well," said Mrs. Richards.

The fact was, that Mr. Richards and his family had now taken up their abode at their handsome new house on their North Wales property, which was distant about six miles from the county town at which the concert was held. Having heard from Mrs. Everton that May was in London again, they procured her address, and wrote to ask her to come and sing for the benefit of the miners. Her father was much out of health, but roused himself so far as to beg she would not refuse. She, thinking most of him, demurred; but it ended by his declaring that he believed the bracing air of North Wales would restore him to health, and so she gladly acceded to Mrs. Richards's request. That lady took the small lodgings for them in which they were located, and to which they had come the previous evening; and she had called that same morning to chaperon May to the concert and introduce her to her fellow performers. All arrangements concerning the songs to be sung had been made previously, by letter, and May's fame as an accomplished vocalist had preceded her, through the instrumentality of Mrs. Richards.

"Will you have some tea?" asked May, doubtfully; for she never forgot the old distinction between the rank of the inhabitants of the two Derwens.

"I shall be thankful for it, May," replied Mrs. Richards, "for we shall not get home in time for dinner. You must come and see us at our new house, Mr. Goldworthy. It is even more among the mountains than this."

May rang for cups, and an elderly Welshwoman appeared, upon whom she looked already as an old friend. Indeed, she longed to throw her arms about her and embrace her for her grandmother's sake. It was like paradise, she said, to hear her speak in the native language, and she declared it sweeter then Italian, more expressive than French, and as capable of inflection as

German. Her father repeated this to Mrs. Richards with an amused air.

"I am glad she is so patriotic," said that lady. "But I am afraid you do not like Wales, Mr. Goldworthy, or you would not have quitted it so quickly when you last visited us at Derwen."

"The fact was, that when Meredith left I could not endure the stillness," returned Mr. Goldworthy. "You may remember that he was suddenly called away to superintend the works elsewhere, and although my darling devoted herself to me and was like a good fairy in that lonely place, I grew so restless, that when Minister came we agreed to travel for the general good. He argued that it would be for my Madeline's benefit to visit foreign lands, and I covered my own selfishness under that cloak, for I did not wish her altered or improved out of her own sweet self."

"Dear papa, you forget!" interjected May, colouring.

"I do. We are in the habit of complimenting one another in private, Mrs. Richards, until we quite forget ourselves in public. She thinks me the first of artists; I look on her as the pearl of—everything, in short; and we tell one another so until we quite believe it."

"Everyone at Derwen was surprised at your leaving so suddenly. When Mr. Morrison came back he would not credit it," said Mrs. Richards.

"I am afraid I offended them all," sighed Mr. Goldworthy, glancing furtively at May. "We rarely hear from Meredith. Where is he now?"

"In the North of England, I believe. Mr. Richards hopes to settle him in time, but he is so clever and useful, that he has become a kind of general-inspector. His father has taken his place at Derwen, and occupies the house he had."

"Uncle Laban at Glenpant!" exclaimed May. "Cousin Meredith in England! How strange it seems. Great-grandfather says his sight is bad, and writes but seldom. He has not told us this."

"It has only just happened, May, since we came north, and the changes have been so rapid during the last twelve months that I scarcely know where I am myself," laughed Mrs. Richards.

The events were briefly as follows:—May and her father only remained a few weeks at Meredith's house. They were cheerful and happy so long as he was with them, and passed their days sketching and visiting their friends, and their evenings in his pleasant company. But when he was suddenly called away, May soon became aware that her father's spirits sank, and symptoms of his old depression returned. She wrote to her friend, Mr. Minister, and spoke to her grandfather about it. The former at once proposed a foreign tour; the latter took her in his arms, blessed her, and bade her ask the Lord for direction and strength.

"It seems as if I could never leave you again, dear great-grandfather," May had said.

"We must be parted soon in the course of nature, May *fach*," he had replied. "We will thank our Heavenly Father that we have met again, and thou wilt do thy duty by thy earthly one."

And so, with hasty adieux, ill-suppressed tears, and heartfelt regrets, May again bade farewell to the scenes and friends she loved so dearly, to visit lands of which she had scarcely dreamed.

When Meredith returned, his temper, which was naturally hasty, was roused. He said to his grandfather that he knew Goldworthy was a proud man, and he believed he was tired of intercourse with his wife's humbler relatives. Meredith was himself proud and sensitive when he imagined that his superiors by birth slighted him, so he spoke as he felt. Evan had his suspicions, also; born when Goldworthy had taken away his sweet Mary, nurtured during all the intervening years, but crushed down when his son-in-law brought May back to stay amongst her kith and kin. Still, not only he, but all May's friends, believed, and not quite unnaturally, that her father, who was a

gentleman by birth and education, found a residence amongst them unpleasant, and had left hastily accordingly. They made no excuses for the nervous and morbid temperament, for they did not rightly understand it; but they felt aggrieved. There had been an unnatural stiffness in the leave-takings of Aunt 'Lizbeth and the cousins, which May would have failed to comprehend but for her grandmother, who could not restrain the pertinent remark—

"This comes of our Mary's marrying out of her own station. Once people do go to London, 'tis all over with 'em."

And when May was far away, Evan failed to convince either Peggy or the other members of his large family that she was quite the May of her early days. Even Meredith would have it she was altered, just because she and her father had left his hospitable abode so suddenly. He even fancied that they had done so to avoid his seeking a nearer and dearer connection with them; and when his grandfather told him that Mr. Goldworthy had echoed his wishes on that head, he laughed bitterly, and assured the old man that his son-in-law was more ambitious for May than he had been for himself; and as to May, her feelings were purely cousinly; indeed, how should they be otherwise, since she merely considered him her brother.

Old Evan sighed, and prayed that all might come right, though he should not live to see it.

But there was undoubtedly an estrangement which May felt rather than understood. She wrote "home," as she phrased it, regularly. She wrote a long letter to Meredith, at her father's request, explaining, as best she might, their hasty departure; but she felt that his reply was strained. It pained her sadly, but she did not comment upon it to her father, whose temporary depression demanded cheerfulness in those around him. Neither could she allude to it to Meredith himself, for she thought it possible he might have met with some new "Miss Edith" in his wanderings, and so was preoccupied by her. She could but remember how that she, his little cousin, had been but a childish con-

fidante in those days, but that, being now a woman, he might be more reticent.

"I should love him just as dearly were there a dozen Miss Ediths," she had said to herself, over and over again, with tears in her eyes.

Nevertheless, she had been absent from Wales more than twelve months, and had felt intuitively that there was some sort of a cloud between her beloved country and herself which she could not penetrate. But she had not much time for selfish meditations. Her father, and, for that much, her friend, Mr. Minister, were never happy when she was absent from them, and even her letters were written by snatches.

"I suppose Meredith is a rising young man?" asked Mr. Goldworthy of Mrs. Richards; for he was unconscious of this estrangement, and had often thought of those words of old Evan's, when they were so happy together at the little farm.

"He has risen, Mr. Goldworthy," replied Mrs. Richards. "He is received everywhere and much considered. His talents and honesty combined have won him the esteem of everybody we know."

"I am so glad!" exclaimed May, involuntarily.

"And the young ladies are all in love with him because he is so good looking," put in Miss Richards.

But May could not reiterate, "I am so glad," to this information, but only wished she could see him again.

"How did you think great-grandfather was when you left Derwen Fawr, Miss Bertha?" she asked, as if to cover the confusion she felt at the idea of the young ladies admiring Cousin Meredith.

"He seemed just the same as ever, and managed to get to church in the waggonette every Sunday. We always picked him and Peggy up. And Dai Bach is very good to them—almost like you, May. He manages to play the organ, and the vicar and my sister are making a collection to send him to London to have him regularly trained."

"That is what Mrs. Richards wished to do for me,"

said May, with a smile. "Dai Bach is quite taking my place. How can great-grandfather get to church now that you have left Derwen Fawr?"

"Nothing has been changed there yet. My father goes occasionally, and my sister sees to things. The schools and the institute are the difficulty; but your Uncle Laban does his best, and when Mr. Morrison is in the neighbourhood he superintends everything; he has such a head for organisation, papa says."

"What makes my darling look sad?" suddenly interposed Mr. Goldworthy, as May's expressive face underwent many changes.

"Not sad, dear papa," replied May, with a radiant smile, rising, and laying her hand on his shoulder. "We were only talking of great-grandfather and the dear old scenes. I am glad, not sad, for Miss Bertha says he is really quite well."

"We will go there again, some day," returned Mr. Goldworthy with a sigh.

"Your father promises to come and spend a few days with us, May," said Mrs. Richards, rising to go, for the carriage was at the door. "You must keep him up to it. He tries to get out of it by saying that you expect Mr. Minister; but you must bring him also; we have plenty of room. We will send for you next Tuesday, if we do not hear to the contrary. Thank you for singing so beautifully. You must bring your music, and your father shall do what he likes, and we will all help to nurse him."

"Thank you, oh, thank you!" cried May, as Mrs. Richards kissed her affectionately.

She went to the door to see them off. She heard a few words in Welsh from the coach-box, and, looking up, saw an old acquaintance.

"Mr. Gwillem! How do you do? I am so glad to see you again," she cried, and stretched arm and hand to meet the coachman's, who had been an important personage in her old world.

"Is that one of my darling's friends? Then he must

also shake hands with me," said her father, and shook Gwillem's hand, to the amazement of the bystanders, and, perhaps, slightly to the annoyance of the Misses Richards.

"Now we are alone again we will resume that article on art," he said, wearily.

"No, dear papa; you must come for a walk with me. I have been all day in the crowded concert-room, and long to wander into the sunset glow. Look at it flushing the mountains and flooding the river!"

"As thou wilt, sweet poetess," replied her father; and in a few moments their steps were turned westward towards the rapid river that foamed among the mountains.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CLOUDS CLEARING.

May had some difficulty in persuading her father to accept Mrs. Richards's invitation; indeed, she shrank from the visit herself. Still, she reckoned it a positive duty to comply with the wishes of friends who had been so kind to her, though she felt that it would be strange to become a guest of those by whom she must have been always considered an inferior. She packed her own and her father's small boxes, but on the settled Tuesday morning Mr. Goldworthy declared his inability to fulfil his engagement. He was, he said, too nervous for society.

"Dear papa, remember that you told Mrs. Richards that you had left Glenpant because it was so quiet," pleaded May. "Will she not think you contradictory if you refuse to join her cheerful family party?"

"Perhaps so. But at Glenpant I was always reproaching myself for your dear mother's wrecked life, and everyone I met seemed to be asking me, 'What have you

done with sweet Mary Morrison?' Here it is different, for there are no relations."

"Here is the carriage, dear papa," exclaimed May, in despair. "What are we to do?"

"Send it back, my darling, with an apology. I really cannot go."

The landlady was in the doorway, and understood May's difficulty. She at once passed it on to the coachman. He dismounted, and asking a man who stood by to hold his horses, went, hat in hand, into the sitting-room.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but I am ordered not to wait. You are expected to luncheon," he began.

"I am truly sorry, but I am quite incapable," returned Goldworthy.

"Couldn't possibly return without you, sir. As much as my place is worth," said the coachman, who had received a hint from Mrs. Richards previously.

"What am I to do?" asked Goldworthy, hopelessly.

"Come at once, dear papa. You will be strengthened by the drive and refreshed by pleasant company. Never mind your coat. The other is in the portmanteau, and you can change it when you get there. It is really impossible to send back the carriage."

After a little further opposition, May and the coachman prevailed, and Mr. Goldworthy was seated in the carriage. The modest luggage was soon up, May by her father's side, and they were off. But this little scene will give the reader an idea of May's life since she left Glenpant. Her father was what is called "hipped," and needed constant rousing. May's prognostic concerning the drive proved true, and the mountain breezes and glorious scenery revived him as if by magic. By the time they arrived at their destination he was another man, and May was radiant with joy because he was thus transformed.

Plâs Elain, Mr. Richards's new house, was a handsome mansion backed by mountains, and situated near his slate quarries. These, as well as shares in various mines, constituted his wealth in North Wales, and he was well

"And they were off."

known as a man of substance. Although Mr. Goldworthy declared the house too new to be picturesque, and May thought with regret of the sweet, peaceful, antiquated abode her kind friends had tenanted in the south, they both forgot all else in the hospitable reception they met with. No sooner were they in the hall than May uttered an exclamation of delight, for she was welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Everton and their little girl.

"Dear sir! dear Miss Edith! I am so glad," she cried, a hand extended to each, at which they laughed, and she remembered that she had returned in imagination to Derwen.

Her father was scarcely less pleased than herself at meeting these, his best friends in London, but whom neither had seen since their return from the Continent. Mrs. Richards and her other daughters received them just as cordially, and soon conducted them to their rooms, which were near one another. Mr. Goldworthy changed his coat in no time, and looked spruce, if still artistic, as he and May descended the broad staircase together.

It turned out, to May's uneasiness, that all the neighbours and many of the performers at the concert had been invited to meet them; some to luncheon, others to dinner; part one day, part the next. Not that she was uneasy on her own account, but on her father's. Always simple and self-possessed herself, she was not afraid of the people she was introduced to, because she neither aped nor cringed, but was always natural. But he was peculiar, and avoided what is called company, and disliked being flattered merely because he had won name and fame as an artist. He, however, soon set her at her ease by joining in animated conversation, first with one, then with another. She had scarcely realised before how charming her father could be, and could not resist whispering to him, "Dear papa, how well you look! How good you are!"

"It is all your doing, my darling," he replied. "And, perhaps, in part the coachman's."

They both laughed, and he recited the little scene at the lodging so amusingly that everyone else joined.

It is not necessary to tell how May was caressed and admired, not only for her sweet singing, but her sweeter self. She thanked everyone with the utmost simplicity for their kind expressions, and sang to please them from morning to night. There was, indeed, much music; for she was not the only accomplished performer invited to Plâs Elain, but she was the most attractive. Mr. Everton took her father on sketching expeditions, and thus, to the ill-concealed chagrin of both, they were separated.

"My good friend, you must lose her some day," said Mr. Everton, when the devoted father complained that May had not come with them.

"I will never be parted from her while I live," was the reply.

They had been three days at Plâs Elain, and they were to leave on the morning of the fourth. Mr. Richards had been absent all the third day, and he was not expected back to dinner. The party was therefore restricted to the family, and Mr. Everton took the master's place at table. May sat near him, Mrs. Everton on her other side. Mr. Goldworthy was placed by Mrs. Richards, and entertained her and her unmarried daughters by foreign gossip.

"When we are all back in town again you will come and see us at once, May," said Mr. Everton.

"And help in the Crystal Palace teas," added his wife.

"Oh, I long to do something for the children of the pantomimes," replied May. "You remember, dear sir, when you rescued me from the stage and the union, and sent me to my great-grandparents. How well I remember that parting at the railway, and all that passed afterwards—and your kindness, dear Mrs. Everton!"

"And your dancing, and singing, and doll!" laughed Mrs. Everton. "What has become of Terpsichore?"

"I have her still," replied May, blushing. "She is a good friend, for she reminds me of my childhood, and especially of great-grandmother. I took her abroad with

me; and, indeed, the Welsh costume is as pretty as the Italian."

"You are a true patriot, May," laughed Mr. Everton.

"Oh, the whole wide world cannot compare with sweet, wild Wales!" she cried, enthusiastically.

At this moment, to the general surprise, Mr. Richards entered.

"I did not expect to be so soon," he explained. "I have brought a friend with me. I hope you haven't quite cleared the dishes. Stay where you are, Everton; I shall be only too glad to be allowed to eat instead of carving. We have had a hard day's work, distributing money and seeing to the wounded. Some more plates, Johnnes."

While Mr. Richards was speaking, May's eyes were fixed on the door, and before he had concluded she had risen from her seat impulsively, and hurried towards it with the words—

"Cousin! Cousin Meredith!"

"May! Is it possible! Can it be you?" was the greeting she received in return.

Her extended hands were soon clapsed in those of Meredith, and both forgot, for the moment, the place and the hour. Mr. Richards had planned this little surprise, having abstained purposely from telling Meredith whom he was to meet.

The confused greetings that ensued did away with all embarrassment, if there were any, and when Meredith finally approached Mr. Goldworthy, he was able to meet him without any display of the agitation which he really felt.

"Meredith, my good friend, this is a delightful surprise," said that gentleman, grasping his hand. "Why have you not written? We have been in despair, my Madeline and I."

"Explanations after dinner, if you please, gentlemen," broke in Mr. Richards, who was a man of business, and would have no loss of time.

So the new arrivals sat down; Meredith between the

Misses Richards and opposite May, the master of the mansion at his wife's side.

"Don't let us interrupt the dinner; we will catch you up, as the children say in their tasks," said Mr. Richards, decidedly, and he was obeyed, as was his wont.

But May's appetite was gone. Meredith had spoilt her dinner for that day. She could only look at him—think of him. In vain Mr. and Mrs. Everton pressed her to eat.

"Indeed, I cannot," she said simply. "I am so happy. We have not met for more than a year. But, dear sir, don't you think he looks ill? And so much older!"

"His life is an anxious and responsible one, May," replied Mr. Everton. He certainly is altered, but, I think, for the better."

"Ah, that could not be," said May, with a smile. "Cousin Meredith must always be the same."

"He certainly is not an old man yet, May. He cannot be more than seven or eight and twenty," laughed Mr. Everton. "Yes, Morrison, we are making personal remarks," he added, as he caught Meredith's inquiring eyes.

The young man coloured and continued his conversation with Miss Bertha. It was rumoured in those parts that Mr. Richards had such a high opinion of him that he would not object to him as a son-in-law, albeit Miss Bertha was slightly his senior. Still, as May remarked to herself, she looked as young as he did.

"Why did you not join us abroad, Meredith?" asked Mr. Goldworthy across the table. "I left word at Plâs Mynydd that we should expect you."

"It was quite impossible," returned Meredith; and May, who knew every inflection of his voice, fancied the response was cold.

"My Madeline also looked for you. We talked much of Cousin Meredith," continued Goldworthy.

"Young men who have their way to make have no time for idle travel, sir," put in Mr. Richards, "and Morrison has not let the grass grow under his feet, I can tell you."

"I admire resolution and perseverance beyond everything," sighed Goldworthy. "If I had possessed them, I should have been a different man."

"We have not all the same physical energy and health," said Meredith; "mental vigour is almost useless without them."

"Thank you for making my apology," returned Goldworthy, with a look at Meredith so affectionate that he must have been obtuse not to read it; but he was obtuse.

In the evening May was planted at the piano as usual, and had no time for a private word with her cousin. But he was near her—at her side—turning over the leaves of her songs, joining in glees, choruses, hymns, and the old tunes that all the party had sung together at Derwen hundreds of times.

"This is almost like practising for the great competition," said May. "Dear papa, what a time that was!"

"A blessed time for me, my darling!" replied her father, whose hand was on her shoulder. "I should have been in my grave, or——"

"Hush, hush, dear!" cried May, suddenly striking up a lively Italian air, to which he hummed a refrain, and the words of which, in patois, he was afterwards prevailed upon to sing.

And so the evening of the reunion of May and her Cousin Meredith passed.

The following morning they met again at breakfast, but he and Mr. Richards disappeared immediately afterwards, and May could not even manage to inform him of their plans. She was disappointed, for it seemed so unnatural; "but then," she thought to herself, "all that is merely conventional is unnatural, and I suppose he and I are growing conventional. Oh! I am thankful my dear papa and Mr. Minister are unconventional."

She and her father were pressed to prolong their visit at Plas Elain, but Goldworthy positively declined. He was as eloquent in his thanks for the hospitality shown him as

even May could desire, and left behind him several val ble sketches that he had taken during his stay, and which were subsequently framed and hung, but not "skyed." Mr. and Mrs. Everton accompanied them on their return journey, and left them at their lodging, exacting a promise that they would visit them at Sydenham as soon as they got back to London.

"That is over. I am thankful!" exclaimed Mr. Goldworthy, as soon as he and May were alone.

"But you enjoyed it, dear papa?"

"Yes, really. But I saw nothing of my darling. The friends were too kind, too appreciative. They engrossed you wholly. Have they spoilt my Madeline? I trow not. But I am not ungrateful. They were kind, and I liked them. But Meredith was not himself."

"No, dear papa," replied May, sadly. "I suppose the world alters us all. He was the same and yet different."

"Can we have offended him?" asked the father.

This question was to be answered, ere long, by Meredith himself, who arrived about tea-time. May chanced to be out of the room when he came, so the two men had a brief *tête-à-tête*.

"My dear Meredith, I am thankful you have come," began Goldworthy. "We have been thinking and talking of nothing but you since our return here. We cannot understand in what way you are altered. Perhaps you can enlighten us."

"Altered? Really——" returned Meredith, and paused, colouring to his hair-roots.

"You see, my friend, there are changes so imperceptible that they can only be felt. A look, a word, a gesture conveys them, and yet you can lay hold of nothing tangible. Often it is a succession of negatives that arouses one's doubts. For instance, you have *not* written; you have *not* made an effort to join us; you have *not* kept alight the torch of friendship of your own free will. This for twelve months! Now that we have met again, you seem—forgive me if I am wrong—you seem reserved, cold, distant

—altered, in short. You know how sensitive my Madeline is, and how well she loves Cousin Meredith. Although she does not say so, I am assured that her tender soul is vexed. Have we offended you? and if so, how?"

This straightforward question perplexed Meredith. He hesitated, as he made an attempt to reply to it, stumbled, and fell, as those who hesitate often do. He found, to his surprise, that Mr. Goldworthy was not conscious of having given cause for his taking offence, and wondered if there really were one.

"I should be so glad to set it right before my Madeline comes in," suggested the anxious father. "I am tolerably indifferent to the fluctuations of friendship myself, but cannot endure that she should suffer from them."

"Then, sir, why did you take her from my house so suddenly?" broke out Meredith. "Why did you remove her, almost without explanation, from those who loved her dearly, although they were only homely countryfolk? She belongs to us, of right, almost more than to you. Her grandparents nurtured her, we all took her to our hearts, she loved us, and, but for the journey to London, would never have left us. Why must the people of the great world rob us of the little world of our fairest flowers?"

"Remember she is my daughter," said Goldworthy, humbly. "What you say pierces my heart, for I have done all you imply. But, indeed, my friend, I meant no wrong. Even when I carried off her sweet mother, it was for love of her."

"And what of those from whom the branch is torn, sir? I leave her, like the sunshine, in my poor home; I return and find it empty and dark. I hear only that her father wills to remove her, and I—I can but believe that it is because he knows I love her."

"Meredith!" exclaimed Goldworthy, starting up and laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, "this is a misconception. I felt my old melancholy returning when you left us. I feared for Madeline—for myself. I wrote to Minister, who knows me, and he it was who arranged

the foreign tour. If you but understand how well I loved her mother, sweet Mary Morrison, you might imagine how the streams, the hills, the woods, the very flowers of her native vales recalled her, and filled me with self-reproaches. They called me 'hipped,' and so I am; but it is by periodical returns of early memories. Hush! Here she comes. Scatter the clouds that lie between her and you as you will—as you will!"

"Cousin Meredith?" exclaimed May, as she came in. "Oh, I am glad!"

"All is well, my Madeline," said her father. "You and Meredith must take a walk together after tea."

And May knew, by Meredith's frank face and loving greeting, that all was well, and before the sun went down started with him for a ramble among the mountains.

CHAPTER XXX.

"FINISHED."

Once more at Mr. Minister's pretty house at Brompton. May and her father returned there from North Wales at its owner's special entreaty. He insisted that there was room for all, and that he was sadly lonely without them. May was truly a damsel in request. Wanted in town by parent and friend; wanted in the country by lover and relatives. But, as we once ventured to predict of her, she was found where duty called. Duty, at that time, lay in applying her talents to practical purposes. Mr. Goldworthy, though improving in health, was still incapable of much work. He painted fitfully, and at long intervals, and was especially advised by his physician not to force his powers, but to allow them to recover themselves. Mr. Minister assured May that he never expected perfect

restoration, but May's faith was stronger, and she said that, if it was God's will, he would be quite himself again.

So she strove to supply part of the deficiencies resulting from their uncertain position. She was told that if she would appear in public as a professional vocalist, she would make her fortune. But she shrank from this, and so did her father for her. She argued that she could not devote herself to him and the public both, conscientiously, since he required so much of her time, and that particularly of an evening, when the uncompromising public would want her; so she sought and obtained some pupils. She also sang occasionally at private parties, where her lovely voice and charm of person and manner won her instant favour. To these her father would, by invitation, accompany her, and his pride and pleasure in her made him forget himself, and become in his turn a centre of attraction.

The artistic house at Brompton also drew artistic guests; and by degrees May not only found herself the admired of her father and friend, but of their circle. We will admit, by the way, that she received and refused more than one offer of marriage at that time of her life, remembering that evening walk among the mountains with her cousin.

Indeed, she never forgot what passed between them on that occasion, the substance of which must be related for the further elucidation of her history.

She and Meredith, at her father's special desire, wandered forth towards the brawling stream that flowed from the mountains. They were soon beyond the precincts of the town and deep in the wild country that they both loved. As they walked on, almost in silence for some time, there rang in his ears the words of her father, "Scatter the clouds that lie between her and you, as you will—as you will;" and when they were in the rare solitude of a mountain gorge, not far from the roystering torrent, he spoke.

"Dear Cousin May, I have been a proud, vain, jealous

fool," he began, impetuously. "I believed that your father took you away from amongst us because he was ashamed of your old friends, and feared that you might love us too well. We all thought this except grandfather, and our Welsh blood grew hot, and we waxed angry, and I fear I must have seemed to you cold and distant."

"Oh, Cousin Meredith! surely you mistake yourself," said May, fixing her eyes upon him.

"I mistook your father, but not myself," he replied.

"Poor papa!" sighed May, her voice expressing pain. "He felt there was misunderstanding somewhere, and I —I knew it. But indeed, Cousin Meredith, I thought you had too keen a pity for him to misdoubt him—or—or me."

The reproachful quiver of the voice went to Meredith's heart.

"Forgive me, dear May," he resumed, "if I misdoubted even you. Your new world is so fair and plausible that I fancied you sometimes pined after it, and were, therefore, nothing loth to hurry back to cultivation and refinement under your father's wing."

"I!" ejaculated May. "What do you mean, cousin? Are you not cultivated, and has not great-grandfather a most refined soul—ready, quite ready, for heaven?"

"Dear May, your words and looks reproach me."

"Do they, cousin? It is unintentional. But, oh! if you knew how I long for the dear old friends and scenes—how I pray to see great-grandfather again before he goes up yonder, you would never have thought those cruel thoughts, or said those unkind words. And as to my dear papa, sadness sometimes overwhelms him, so that he is not master of himself. It was so when he hurried away from your nice—pretty——"

Here May paused, for tears were in her eyes, and her full heart stayed her speech. Meredith took her hand and entreated her forgiveness. He had never before brought tears to her eyes—never, to the best of his recollection,

given her pain. He tried to make her understand that it was pride, and, he feared, jealousy—yes, even of her father; but he saw that her innocent mind could not conceive so strange a feeling in one who had been her hero and friend all her life. So then he told her of a stronger, deeper, intenser feeling that had mastered him and distorted his imagination, and he asked her to spend a lifetime with him in those scenes where their happy childhood had passed.

Let those who can understand our Queen o' the May picture her sweet and radiant face at such words as these from one whom she had loved all her life. But even at such a moment, when all she most desired was outspread before her, she thought of others.

"Oh, Cousin Meredith!" she exclaimed. "You know—you know—how glad it would make me; but I cannot leave my poor papa, and he—he would go, perhaps, melancholy mad in the silence of the country."

"We will ask him, dear May," he said.

"No, you must not ask him; for he would at once say 'Yes,' because he loves me so," she replied, with a smile so sweet and sunshiny that Meredith wondered not at his own or her father's love.

"It is hard that——" began Meredith, and checked himself. He was going to add, "that your father, whom you have known but for a few years, should come between you and happiness."

"Nothing is *quite* hard, cousin," she rejoined, "and all will be right again now that we understand one another. For the rest we must wait."

It was late that evening when they returned to Mr. Goldworthy, and they found him pacing the room in restless anxiety lest some harm should have happened to his Madeline. He saw that she was safe and happy, and that sufficed him. He was too absent to make further inquiries, and Meredith respected May's wishes that, for the present, at least, no revelations should be made to him. But they were a happy trio that night, and all clouds had melted

into thin air that had previously intervened between them and the clear blue sky.

And this was the state of affairs when May and her father once more took up their abode with their friend Minister, and shared the expenses of house and housekeeping with him. While they worked at their artistic callings in London, Meredith laboured at his more utilitarian undertakings in Wales, and so Time, with his rapid wings, sped on. Mrs. Everton procured May several pupils at Sydenham, which took her to the house of her kind friends once a week, and enabled her to engage in the work she was so desirous of undertaking among the children of the pantomimes and ballet. She never forgot her early days and associations, and she devoted such money and time as she could spare to aiding those who were struggling into the doubtful career from which she was, providentially, rescued. In this her father assisted her, and they might often be seen in strange and poor quarters, seeking out distressed and neglected children or young girls whose histories reminded them of her own. Thus they became acquainted with many of the sad sights and sounds of gigantic London, and said to one another, even with tears, that they could not, and would not, spend one vain farthing while tens of thousands of their fellow creatures immediately surrounding them wanted the common necessaries of life.

"I cannot feel gay here as in the country, dear papa," she said. "It seems to crush me when I think of the sorrow and the poverty that cannot be cured. At Derwen every one helped one another, and the fresh air and the birds and streams comfort us; but here, where the poor live, it is so close and dark that it must stifle them."

"God is everywhere, my darling," sighed Goldworthy; "and He knows—He knows! He even restored you to me, sinner that I am."

"And under Him, we owe it to the great Welsh choir, dear papa. But for that I should not have come to Lon-

don, and Mr. Minister would not have recognised my shock head," said May, laughing merrily.

"Yet my Madeline loves her wild Wales best!" sighed the father. "When did you hear last from Cousin Meredith?"

"Only a few days ago, dear papa. He was then at Glenpant, and said great-grandfather had actually been staying two whole days with Uncle Laban."

"He is so bright and cheerful that it is a pleasure to be with him, my darling. Had he remained at home I should not have had a melancholy fit."

"A poor compliment to me, sir!" said May, shaking her pretty head in affected displeasure, while she felt a strange hopefulness at her heart.

But hopes and fears, plans and counterplans were suddenly stayed by the serious illness of Mr. Goldworthy. He had been overworking. We have said that his labours were fitful as were his moods. He had begun a large picture from sketches taken abroad, and both his own will and May's were bent on its completion. Minister alone warned them to "take it easy." But in this instance his warnings were unheeded, and, as he was much from home, could not be often repeated. May was delighted to find what energy her father was able to throw into his work, and encouraged him to persevere at all times and under all circumstances. She watched him, read to him, sang to him while he was at work, as she had done during the progress of that first successful picture; and now, as then, he declared that if it was worth anything it was due to his Madeline. It was, of course, to be exhibited, and had to be finished in time for presentation at the Royal Academy.

The eve of the last day for sending in pictures arrived, and it was not finished. He worked, so to say, day and night, and stood, with May at his side, putting in the final touches on the very morning of the said day.

"There!" he exclaimed, throwing down his brush.

"She watched him."

"Beautiful! It is perfect, dear, dear papa!" said May, casting her arms round him.

But those frail arms failed to support him. He fell down on a couch, happily near at hand, and fainted. May rang the bell violently. She thought he was dead. When the servant came they managed to lay him on the couch and to procure water and restoratives, which, happily, revived him. When he smiled on his terrified child, she cried, "Thank God! my dear, dear papa!" burst into tears, and threw her arms about him. Then she bade the servant fetch a doctor, assuring her that she was not afraid to be left.

"Finished, my darling," said her father, returning her embrace, and striving to rise.

But he could not. His look turned from May to his painting. It seemed to her hopelessly sad.

"It shall go, dear papa. It shall be in time," she said, assuringly. "Drink this wine. You have worked too hard. It was my fault. I was too proud of my dear papa."

Her tears fell into the glass she held, and he smiled as he drank the wine with which they mingled.

The doctor arrived, who was known to them both as a friend of Mr. Minister's.

"The general complaint—overwork," he said, glancing from his patient to the picture. We must get him to bed. I will help you, my dear."

The kind doctor—all doctors *are* kind—assisted Goldworthy to his room, and he was soon in bed. He asked where Minister was, and as May did not know, said she must have some other friend with her, as he could not allow her to be alone. She assured him that she had no fear; and he, not liking to alarm her, inquired of the servant the address of some of her friends. She gave him that of Mr. Everton. He said he would himself telegraph to that gentleman. He prescribed all sorts of remedies, promised to return shortly, and went to the nearest telegraph office.

Neither May nor any of her friends had realised her father's constitutional as well as nervous debility, and she now reproached herself for inciting him to exertions of which apparently he was not capable. She stood by his bedside tearful but prayerful. She watched him, and administered the remedies and food prescribed until he fell asleep; and then she watched on, dreading from his evident exhaustion that he might pass away before her eyes. She was holding his hand, and dared not move for fear of startling or disturbing him.

She knew not how long she remained standing by his bedside, her hand in his; but she was herself startled by the quiet entrance of Mrs. Everton. She laid her finger on her lip, but he did not awake.

"Ask Mr. Everton to see to the sending of the picture," she whispered, and her friend Edith again disappeared.

Mr. Everton was waiting downstairs, and as men had arrived who had been already hired for the transport of the picture, he superintended its packing and placing in the van waiting at the door. This was fortunate, for Goldworthy's first words on awaking were—

"Finished, my darling. Is it in time?"

"It is sent, dear papa," replied May, cheerfully. "Now you must take nourishment to strengthen you after so much labour. For my sake."

"Anything for your sake, my Madeline," he returned, forcing himself to swallow what she presented.

The doctor came again and Minister returned, so there was a consultation of friends below stairs. It appeared that he had simply needed rest and quiet, when, urged by his own excitability and Minister's friendly anxiety, he had travelled, painted, and frequented society. Thus do we often misunderstand not only ourselves, but those we love. He was now prostrated, mind and body, and the doctor said that his recovery was doubtful. It must depend, under all circumstances, on good nursing, freedom from anxiety, and rest. May knew that the money received for the first great picture was nearly gone; still, she felt that she must

put off her lessons in order to be with him always. Minister, though generous, was not rich, and May's independent nature would fain hinder her from being burdensome to him. However, her faith failed not; and in her simplicity she trusted, not only in God, but in her friends. In a hurried letter to Meredith she told him of her father's illness, but did not allude to their circumstances.

For two or three days the invalid continued in a weak, drowsy, half-conscious state. The doctor shook his head, Minister groaned in spirit, the Evertons came and went, and May watched and prayed. On the evening of the third day she was swallowing a hasty cup of tea in the pretty drawing-room while Minister was with her father, when she was startled by the opening of the door, and the ejaculation of her name in a dear, familiar voice. It was Meredith. Her joy and her tears may be imagined. He had come to her as soon as he had received her letter.

"I will tell dear papa you are here. I must go to him," she said, almost as soon as their salutations ceased.

She found her father awake, and watching for her return. The news of Meredith's arrival roused him.

"Let him come," he said, feebly, and they were the first words he had spoken all that day.

May fetched her cousin, who was soon holding her father's hand, while she stood by his side. The patient looked anxiously from one to the other.

"Is all well between you?" he asked, feebly.

"All is well, dear sir," replied Meredith.

"Then—if I die—you will take her back—to—Derwen, and if I live—I shall be happiest and best—with you."

At these words May's hand joined those of her father and Meredith, and that compact was sealed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WELCOME HOME.

THERE was a great stir in and around the Derwen collieries. One after another the men came up from the pit grimy and besooted, went to their homes up the ravine or elsewhere, and emerged from them clean and spruce as soap and water and best clothes could make them. The women and children were also in holiday attire, and it was apparent that some unusual event was to take place. The collier lads were actually wreathing the old black crane with evergreens, and the young men of the institute were erecting some sort of triumphal arch across the road that led from it to Derwen Fawr, Mr. Richards's old place. It was autumn, and the fields were ripe for the harvest. The great oaks round about the institute were beginning to change their brilliant green garments for gorgeous red and yellow; the heather and fern-clad mountains were also adorning themselves in purple and crimson; and, to complete the garish picture, scarlet poppies flaunted among the corn by the wayside and in the festal wreathings. These latter were completed as evening approached, and many women and children stood about the grassy road in front of the institute, and on the hillock beneath the wreathed crane at the mouth of the pit. The sun had nearly reached the mountains, and was scattering his golden arrows down upon our world, and kindling into light and warmth the trees, meadows, and brooks of favoured Derwen, as well as the animated, expectant faces of its inhabitants.

"The train is due at six; they will surely be here before seven," remarked one of the colliers to Dr. George, who was superintending.

"It will be a good time for us, let them come late or early," said another. "It isn't like the same place since

Richards, Derwen Fawr, and his family went north. Nobody to see to the schools, or the institute, or anything, for the vicar can't be everywhere."

"Here they are! here they are!" shouted an advance picket of young boys, who began to cheer and halloo vigorously as a waggonette was seen coming along the by-road towards the institute.

The cheers were taken up by the colliers, and their wives waved their handkerchiefs and shouted also. The horses seemed inspired by the hurrahs, and drew the carriage so briskly that it was at the institute in no time, and suddenly pulled up underneath the floral arch that spanned the road.

"Let us get down, if you please, Uncle Laban," said a cheerful voice; and in another minute May and Meredith stood amongst the old friends who had assembled to welcome them.

There was a great shaking of hands and much congratulation, Dr. George being first.

"I am wishing you joy, yes seure, May fach—I ask your pardon, Mrs. Morrison," said an old woman who hobbled towards May. "When was you married?"

"Just three weeks ago, Shanno," replied May, blushing beneath her pretty hat. "And, oh we are so glad to come home. "Yes, Derwen is home, Davy," she added, as a collier thrust out his hand. "What a lovely arch! Look, Meredith. They have put a wreath round the old crane. Do you remember that it was just here where you came to meet me and great-grandfather when first I came to Derwen?"

"I remember, May. And yours was the first sixpence given towards our institute," returned happy Meredith.

"And it is buried under the foundation-stone," broke in a bystander. "Three cheers for Morrison, Derwen Fawr, and his wife."

Again the oaks and hills re-echoed to the hurrahs.

"How kind you all are—how very, very kind!" said

May, tears filling her eyes. "How delightful is Wales! How dear the oaks and hills of Derwen!"

"If you will drive on, father, we will follow on foot," said Meredith to Uncle Laban, who was charioteer, and who had some difficulty in restraining the horses, as well as the fears of 'Lizbeth, his wife, who was located in the waggonette.

They drove on accordingly.

"Where was you married, my dear?" asked old Shanno, with persistent curiosity.

"In London, Shanno," blushed May, while a score of women pressed round to listen.

"And who was marrying you?" asked one of them.

"Mr. Everton, who married Miss Edith. You remember him. It was he who sent me to great-grandfather when I was a little girl," said May. "They have been very good to us."

"Yes, seure. All Richards, Derwen Fawr's family, are good Christians. So are all the Morrisons, the Lord be praised," said a man who was holding Meredith's hand.

"Thank you, every one, for the beautiful Bible you gave us," spoke Meredith, at the top of his voice. "We hope to do our best to follow its precepts."

"Now let us go on, Meredith," whispered May.

Arm-in-arm went the happy couple, surrounded by the crowd of friends, shouting and hurrahing beneath the rosy hues of approaching sunset. They found another floral arch over the modest gate that protected the drive to Derwen Fawr, and above it, in Welsh, the motto, "Welcome Home." It seemed very strange to both that this was to be, henceforth, their home. Still, Meredith led his beloved bride proudly up the drive, surrounded by their old friends.

"Dear great-grandfather!" exclaimed May, breaking away from him at the sight of a little group that stood outside the house awaiting their arrival.

Foremost of this group was old Evan, leaning on his staff, with Peggy on one side and Dai Bach on the other.

May's arms were round Evan in a moment, and the first words she heard on the threshold of her new home were, "God bless you, my children! Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," from Evan's voice, in her beloved Welsh.

"Bless us, there's pretty you do look, May fach!" was Peggy's greeting, as they embraced each other.

"It is my turn now, *my* darling," came from the porch, and May was in her father's arms.

"And mine next, for I have made your house mine inn," sounded from her friend Mr. Minister's cheery voice.

"I am nowhere," broke out Meredith, grasping hand after hand, as the happy family party went into the house, amid the cheers of the friends outside.

"We have a tea and meeting at the institute. You must look in by-and-by, Meredith," said Uncle Laban, and he departed, accompanied by Dai Bach.

"Dear papa! dear cousin! I mean——" said May, who was for ever calling her husband "Cousin Meredith."

"You mean *mio sposo carissimo*," supplied the father, laughing. "What was my darling about to say?"

"That it is so beautiful that I think it must be fairy-land, and Meredith is still the fairy prince," she replied, looking round at her pretty drawing-room, in which loving hearts and hands had placed all that was attractive and artistic.

"'Tis mighty fine," cried old Peggy. "And only to think of Mr. Richards putting Meredith in his place, and making him manager of everything—above his own father and grandfather. And you, May fach, to be a grand lady, who came here with nothing but that doll, Terp, and an old wreath."

"Ah!" sighed Evan, "I don't forget how I threw them into the fire. But the Lord's ways are not ours. Praise His holy name."

"Dear great-grandfather, how good you were to me!" said May, her arm round his neck.

"Come you and take off your things," said 'Lizbeth.

"There's Leah and little Gwen in the kitchen helping to get supper, and it will be ready directly."

While May first pays her cousins a visit in the kitchen, then runs from room to room admiring her house, and finally takes off her travelling dress in a charming room overlooking the brook and distant hills, we must give a brief sketch of what happened after Mr. Goldworthy's serious illness.

That he recovered, his presence at Derwen proclaimed; but his recovery was slow, and he continued very weak after he was pronounced convalescent. His one great desire seemed to be to witness the accomplishment of what he had begun on his sick bed, and to see his child married. Circumstances favoured this desire. His picture sold for even a larger sum than its predecessor, and enabled him to defray all the expenses of his illness and his other liabilities, and to give May a handsome sum for her outfit and start in married life. Mr. Richards had for some time wished Meredith to take possession of Derwen Fawr; but as a bachelor, he had been averse to so doing. But when he became engaged to May, he spoke to Mr. Richards about it; and it was settled to the general satisfaction that he should at once inhabit the house and prepare it for the reception of his bride. He found the interval between April and the end of September sufficient for this. A portion of Mr. Richards's furniture remained in the house, and to this was added all that love could imagine and his means allow. But package after package arrived from London, sent by Messrs. Goldworthy and Minister; so that what his hardly-earned savings were insufficient to purchase, their affection supplied.

It was arranged, by general entreaty and consent, that Goldworthy should live with his children, having the privilege of joining his friend Minister at Brompton when he liked. In return for this, Minister was to find a country home at Derwen both "in season and out of season," if so be true hospitality is ever to be found "out of season." To inaugurate this mutual benefit, the two friends came to

Derwen together a few days after the wedding. The said wedding took place from Mr. Minister's house, and was quiet but pretty. Our May Queen had hawthorn mixed with her bridal wreath by her father's wish. Her bridesmaid was Mrs. Everton's wee daughter, a little maiden of five; and she, her mother and father, were the only guests at the modest wedding-breakfast, save Cousin George, who was Meredith's best man. The bride and bridegroom spent their honeymoon abroad, and positively affirmed, when questioned by Mr. Minister, that no cloud had darkened that happy period. Thus, having filled up the time while May disrobed, we will follow her fortunes a little longer.

Everyone insisted that May should take the place of honour at supper, so she sat, all blushes and smiles, between her father and grandfather, the latter having a special chair provided for him. He was hale still, though he had long passed his fourscore years. Meredith had his mother and grandmother on either side of him; and here we may state, once for all, that neither he nor May was ever loth to own as those best and nearest, the less educated, but worthy, relatives by whom they were immediately surrounded.

"Thank God that we have thee and Meredith amongst us for aye," said old Evan. "She has been a good child to us all, sir; she will be a good wife," he added to Goldworthy.

"What she has been to me, and how she nursed me, sir, no tongue shall say," returned Goldworthy.

"Oh, don't, if you please! ejaculated May.

It was a sociable and joyous meal, and after it was over, Meredith whispered to May that he must leave her for a short space to go to the institute.

"May I not go too?" she exclaimed. "Cannot we all go?"

The word passed round, and it was settled that the party should adjourn to the institute. Evan declared that he felt quite young again, and could walk as many miles as

the distance was yards. They went accordingly, and were received with cheers. The tea, which had been given by the Morrisons, father and children, was over, and the concert had begun.

"Give up your seat, Dai Bach; we must have May. She will play and sing for us," circled around.

And May went, quite naturally, to the harmonium and took the place vacated by Dai Bach. Meredith and the rest followed. All were at once absorbed in that absorbing art, music, and bride and bridegroom were soon leading the choirs as of old, while Laban swayed to and fro as leader, old Evan beat time, and Peggy quavered whenever she could.

"Play Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March,' dear May," whispered Meredith. "You played it when Mr. and Mrs. Everton were married. It was a good beginning. Play it for us."

"Do," pleaded Goldworthy, who overheard.

"Is it not vain, dear Meredith—dear papa?" she asked. "It is so exultant."

But the suggestion somehow got wind, and everyone asked for the "Wedding March." Obedient May began it, trembling slightly. But Meredith's hand was on her shoulder, and her soul rose to the triumphant strain. She played her own epithalamium gloriously, but there was moisture in her eyes as she did so. The cheers that succeeded dried them.

The music was followed by speeches from the colliers, all congratulatory, to which Meredith replied from an overflowing heart. The substance of what he said was, that he and his wife would strive to do their duty, God helping them.

Then old Evan rose, and, spreading out his hands, prayed for a blessing on his grandchildren and their assembled friends.

And thus ended the "welcome home."

THE END.

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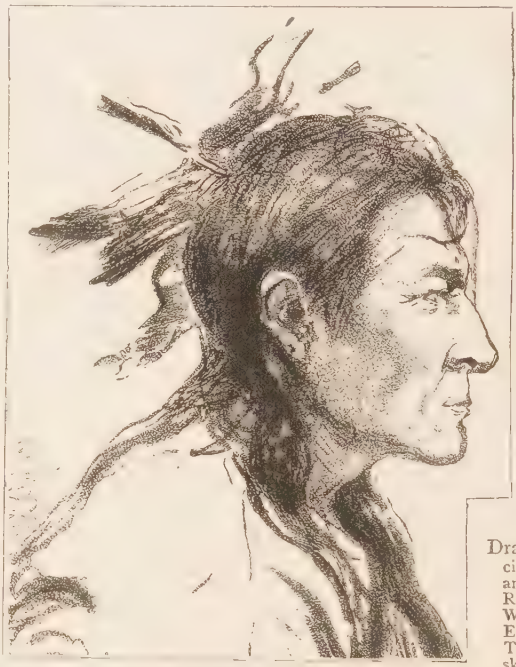

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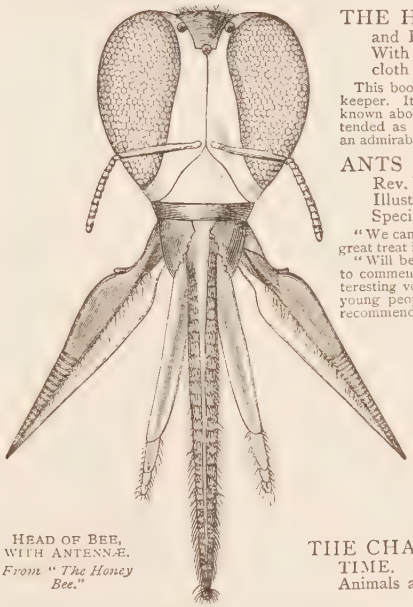

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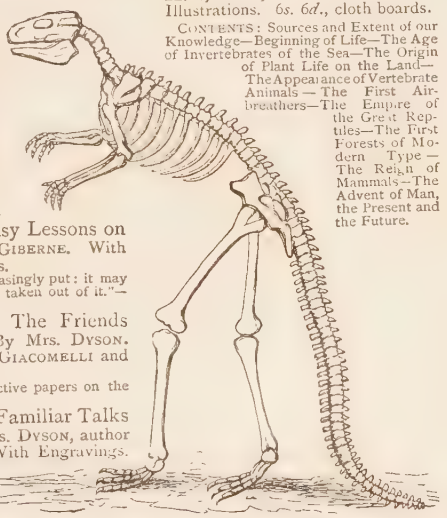

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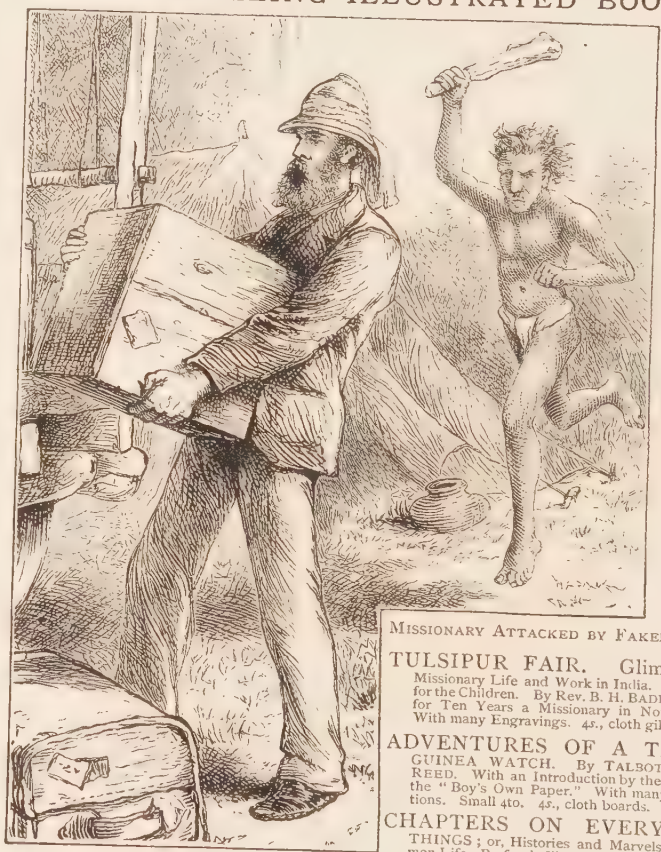

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